

## Continence: Key points when managing incontinence

Incontinence is the involuntary loss of urine and/or faeces. The personal cost to a person who has incontinence can be loss of dignity and independence.

An estimated 3.8 million Australians experience some level of incontinence. It is a significant health issue within the community and the impact of incontinence on a person's life is often not fully appreciated.

Incontinence may affect people of any age, both male and female, and there are many possible causes. Incontinence can have a major impact on the person's lifestyle, affecting physical, emotional and social wellbeing.

Many people develop mechanisms to deal with their incontinence and think of it as a normal part of ageing. Providing a person who experiences incontinence with the information they need to seek help and support is a very important step in the management of incontinence.

### Continence Assessment

Assessment by a health professional with continence expertise is the initial key point to managing incontinence. There are many differing causes for both urinary and faecal incontinence, and the cause needs to be determined before appropriate management can be implemented.

Health professionals from a variety of disciplines may be involved in the process, however, it is often the General Practitioner who may refer the person to a specialist for further assistance. The specialist may be a urogynaecologist, gynaecologist, urologist, colorectal surgeon, continence nurse advisor or continence physiotherapist. There are also continence services available in the community and major hospitals.

### Good Bladder and Bowel Habits

Public awareness relating to continence issues and understanding of good bladder and bowel habits help people to better manage bladder and bowel problems.

### Diet

Eating appropriate quantities of cereals, fruit and vegetables increases your levels of dietary fibre. This in turn helps avoid constipation and prevents straining, which may cause weakening of the pelvic floor muscles. A healthy diet will also help to maintain a healthy body weight. Being overweight may contribute to weakening of the pelvic floor muscles.

## Maintain a Good Fluid Intake

Maintaining a good fluid intake will keep the body hydrated. Drinking six to eight glasses of fluid daily, unless otherwise advised by your doctor, will assist. It is important to limit drinks that contain caffeine or alcohol, as they may cause bladder irritability. If fluid intake is low, urine may be concentrated and this may cause bladder irritability. Urine should be a pale yellow or straw colour.

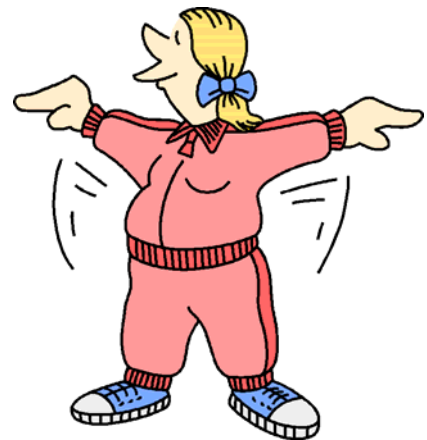
Maintaining an adequate fluid intake may also help prevent constipation.

## Good Toilet Habits

Go to the toilet when your bladder is full and when you feel the need to go, don't make a habit of going to the toilet "just in case". When going to the toilet do not rush, take your time and empty the bladder or bowel completely.

## Exercise

Exercise is important for us all. Regular exercise helps to keep muscles of the body toned and functioning well. Exercise also helps keep the pelvic floor muscles toned, helps to prevent constipation and assists bodyweight control. Another advantage of exercise is that it helps with a feeling of general wellbeing.



## Looking after the Pelvic Floor Muscles

These muscles support the pelvic organs and assist the control of both bladder and bowel function. Exercising these muscles regularly will help to maintain their muscle tone and strength, and therefore help with good bladder and bowel control. Continence Physiotherapists and Continence Nurse Advisors are trained to help people learn how to exercise and strengthen the pelvic floor muscles.

## Continence Products

For some people, incontinence cannot be treated and management with continence products is needed to achieve social continence. Once again, appropriate assessment is the key to effective management with continence products. The type and severity of the incontinence need to be taken into consideration as well as personal requirements such as the person's age, gender, mobility, cognitive function and attitude to the incontinence.

Choosing a suitable continence product can be overwhelming because there are many products available. A continence nurse advisor can assist with the assessment and selection. Trialling a range of products may be required before a suitable product is found. Considerations include the type and severity of the incontinence, the person's mobility and lifestyle, product disposal or washing requirements, and cost and availability of the products. Continence products may only be needed for a short time in conjunction with treatment, while for others the products may be a long-term solution.

## The range of continence products includes:

- Disposable pads, pants, all-in-ones, bed and chair pads
- Reusable pads, pants, bed and chair pads
- Uridomes/sheaths/external male catheters
- Urinary drainage bags and urinary catheters
- Waterproof mattress protectors
- Toileting equipment
- Dressing adaptations
- Odour control and skin care products.



The Continence Resource Centre has an extensive display of continence products for viewing by the public. Information on ranges of continence products and where these products are available is provided to people who visit the centre, and information may also be provided by phone, fax or email enquiries to the Centre.

## Funding Schemes for Continence Products

Some people with incontinence may be eligible for financial assistance for continence products to manage their condition. These funding schemes have differing eligibility criteria and funding allocations. For further information on these funding schemes for continence products, contact the Continence Resource Centre.

## More information

See also our information on:

- *Continence Resource Centre*  
The Continence Resource Centre is a statewide continence information and advisory service located at the Independent Living Centre (ILC).
- *Continence Products*  
Incontinence may be treated, improved, or managed effectively through the use of continence products. There is a wide range available and new and improved products are continually being developed.
- *Continence: Managing Incontinence When Travelling*  
Incontinence does not mean you have to stay at home. There are many services, continence products and types of toileting equipment available to help.

## Useful Websites

- Continence Foundation of Australia: [www.continence.org.au](http://www.continence.org.au)
- SA Continence Resource Centre: [www.continencesa.org.au](http://www.continencesa.org.au)
- Australian Government Bladder and Bowel Website: [www.bladderbowel.gov.au](http://www.bladderbowel.gov.au)
- National Public Toilet Map: [www.toiletmap.gov.au](http://www.toiletmap.gov.au)

Contact the Continence Resource Centre (located at the Independent Living Centre) if you would like further information on resources for managing incontinence.

**Phone:** (08) 8266 5260

**Email:** [continance@dcsi.sa.gov.au](mailto:continance@dcsi.sa.gov.au)

**Website:** [www.sa.gov.au/disability/crc](http://www.sa.gov.au/disability/crc)

## Contacting the Independent Living Centre

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre. The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre

11 Blacks Road

Gilles Plains SA 5086

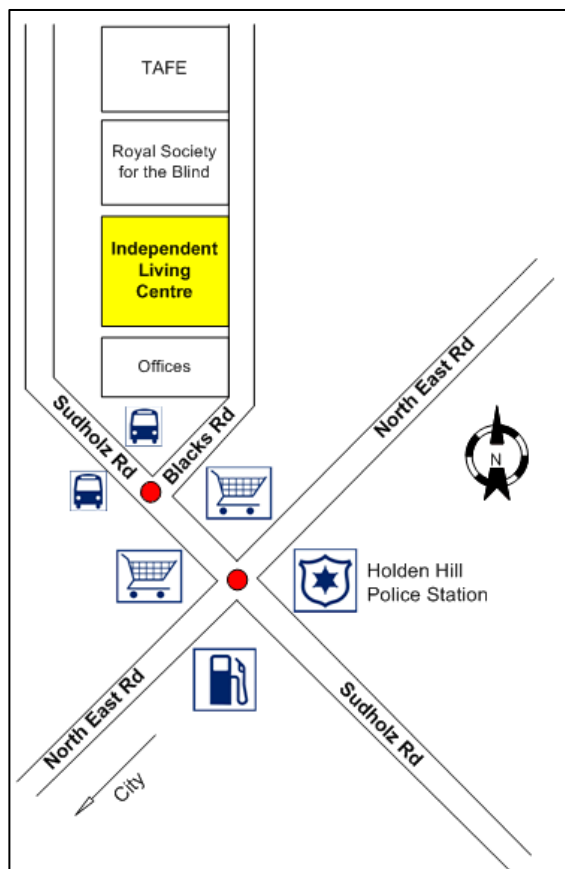
Phone: 1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only) or 8266 5260

Email: [ilcsa@dcsi.sa.gov.au](mailto:ilcsa@dcsi.sa.gov.au)

Website: [www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc](http://www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc)

Accessible off street parking is available.

Bus services run nearby. Call 8210 1000 for timetable information.



Copies of this publication are available from the Disability Information Service

Tel: 1300 786 117 Email: [disabilityinfo@dcsi.sa.gov.au](mailto:disabilityinfo@dcsi.sa.gov.au) Website: [www.sa.gov.au/disability](http://www.sa.gov.au/disability) Version: June 2013



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