

WHAT IS INCONTINENCE? HOW DO YOU MANAGE IT?

Is incontinence keeping you home? Would you rather be socialising?

Over 5 million Australians, or 1 in 4 people aged over 15 years, experience bladder or bowel incontinence. Incontinence is a common condition that can be treated and proactively managed. Incontinence can affect people at any age and is common among women and the aging population. It can be prevented, better managed, or even cured with the right support team.

One of the social impacts of incontinence are the common feelings of shame and embarrassment or the fear being judged by others. This can lead to social isolation, avoidance of social situations, and decreased participation in activities that were previously enjoyed. People may also experience anxiety and depression, further exacerbating the impact on their social life.

Age can impact continence in both men and women. As we age, the muscles and nerves that control bladder and bowel function may weaken, leading to stress incontinence or urge incontinence. Neurological changes, medical conditions and medications can all impact on continence. Childbirth is a common cause of continence issues in women of all ages, as the body rapidly changes during pregnancy and birth.

If you are experiencing continence issues, there are some steps you can take to manage and improve your condition to start socialising again:

- 1. Talk to your healthcare provider:** Your doctor, specialist or allied health professional can support you with an effective treatment plan.
- 2. Visit a women's health physiotherapist:** Your physio can help you learn correct technique for pelvic floor exercises which help strengthen the muscles that control urination and bowel movements. Regularly practicing these exercises can improve bladder and bowel control over time.
- 3. Adopt healthy habits:** Making healthy lifestyle changes can help manage incontinence. This includes maintaining a healthy weight, eating a balanced diet, drinking plenty of water, and daily gentle exercise. A dietician and exercise physiologist can support your health and wellness journey.
- 4. Use absorbent products:** Absorbent products like pads, liners, or continence aids can help manage leakage and provide a sense of security and comfort. There are a variety of products available in different sizes and absorbency levels to meet individual needs.



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5. Seek support: Continence issues can be overwhelming, but it is important to remember that you are not alone. Reaching out to your peers and loved ones can help alleviate some of the emotional burden and provide a sense of community and understanding.

Continence issues is a journey, and it may take time to find the right combination of treatments and strategies that work for you. With patience, persistence, and a positive mindset, it is possible to manage continence issues and improve your quality of life.

For more support

The Continence Aids Payment Scheme (CAPS) is an Australian Government scheme that provides an annual payment to assist eligible people who have permanent and severe incontinence to meet some of the cost of their continence products. CAPS payments are not payable to people who receive continence product financial support in their NDIS plan or from DVA. The CAPS payment rate for 2022–23 is \$650.40. Please call the **CAPS Information Team on 1800 239 309**.

DVA (1800 838 372) Gold card holders with a clinical need may be eligible to receive continence product financial support.

The National Continence Helpline (1800 33 00 66) is staffed by Nurse Continence Specialists who offer free and confidential information, advice and support to people affected by incontinence. They also provide a wide range of continence resources and information on local continence services.

