



WHAT ARE CONTINENCE PRODUCTS?

Continence products help manage the symptoms of poor bladder and bowel control. They may be used for a short time during treatment. They can also be used long term if poor bladder and bowel control can't be cured.

There are a wide range of products to help manage bladder or bowel control problems. Continence nurse advisors can help choose the right product for you that will give you the most protection and that you can rely on with confidence.

Your doctor or continence nurse advisor can also look for the cause of your problem and offer you some treatment. If you do not try any treatment or if you just use pads or other continence products without getting advice, the problem could get worse.

WHAT TYPES OF CONTINENCE PRODUCTS ARE THERE?

Absorbent pads and pants:

- come in a range of sizes
- differ in how much urine they can soak up (absorb)
- can be disposable (single use) or reusable (washable).

Disposable pads and pants:

- can be very absorbent
- are made to be used once only then thrown out
- can be used with special mesh pants that keep the pads from slipping
- may have adhesive strips to stick to underwear or mesh pants keeping the pad in place
- are designed for easy disposal.

Reusable pads and pants:

- can be washed and re-used many times
- are better suited to light urine loss.

Make sure you change your continence product regularly

Also clean and dry your skin every time you change.

This is important to:

- prevent leakage onto your clothing or in your bed
- reduce your risk of urinary tract infections
- reduce your risk of a skin rash
- prevent any smells.

Absorbent bed pads and chair pads:

- can be disposable or reusable
- work best when the skin is in direct contact with the chair or bed pad:
 - The top layer in contact with the skin lets the urine right through.
 - This layer takes the urine away from the skin so the skin stays dry.
 - The lower layers soak up the urine loss.
- are not meant to be used at the same time as pads or pants:
 - They can be used as a back-up to absorbent pads or pants.
 - They can reduce leaks onto beds and chairs.

Penile sheaths for men

Some men prefer to use a penile sheath drainage system (also known as condom drainage) instead of a pad. The sheath fits closely over the penis and is connected to a drainage leg bag which collects the urine.

A larger drainage bag can be used overnight. A continence nurse advisor needs to carefully assess any man thinking about using a penile sheath. It is important to use the right product and to get information about proper care. Penile sheaths are better for men with moderate to heavy urine loss.

Catheters

A catheter is a hollow tube that drains urine directly from the bladder. There are several types of catheterisation techniques:

- Short term — the catheter is left in for short time and then removed. For example, after surgery.
- Long term — the catheter is left in to drain urine and is changed on a regular basis.
- Suprapubic — a tube is inserted into the bladder through the abdominal wall.
- Intermittent catheterisation — the bladder is emptied several times a day and the catheter is removed each time the bladder is emptied.

The short, long term and suprapubic catheters drain into a drainage bag or can be connected to a valve. The catheter is connected to a leg bag during the day and a larger drainage bag overnight. Catheters are only used if absolutely necessary and are prescribed by a doctor or specialist.

OTHER PRODUCTS TO HELP TOILETING

If confined to bed:

- bedpans and urinals (male and female) can be used.

If you have restricted mobility:

- a commode chair placed by the bed at night can help if it is:
 - difficult to walk to the toilet
 - hard to get to the toilet in time.
- trouble getting down or up from low toilets can be helped using:
 - raised toilet seats
 - over the toilet frames
 - chairs that can be moved over the toilet.

WHAT SHOULD YOU THINK ABOUT WHEN CHOOSING A CONTINENCE PRODUCT?

The best product is one that:

- works well
- is comfortable
- helps you to have a normal life.

When choosing a continence product, you should think about:

1. Your personal bladder or bowel control problem

Your choice of product depends on your own control needs at any one time.

Choose a product that:

- is comfortable to wear
- doesn't leak
- is affordable
- is easy to use
- no one else can tell that you are wearing it.

2. Your personal lifestyle

This should guide your choice of products. You need to consider your personal needs for:

- work
- home
- your social life.

You might need special products to use when you:

- play sport
- travel long distances.

Continence nurse advisors can help with advice on special products.

3. Your mobility

There is a vast range of products and one that is just right for you. Think about your habits and abilities. This can help to guide the right choice of product for you.

Ask yourself:

- How easily can I get to the toilet?
- How easy is it for me to change pads?

4. Supply of products

Some continence products can be bought in supermarkets and chemists. It is easier to buy others from specialist medical suppliers. You might need expert help to choose the right supplier for you.

Contact the **National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66**.

They can give you advice. They can also give you the contact details for a continence nurse advisor in your area.

5. Disposal

Most disposable products can be thrown away in normal household rubbish. Continence products should never be flushed down the toilet.

WHO PAYS FOR CONTINENCE PRODUCTS?

Continence products can be costly. In most cases you will need to pay for them yourself. If you have permanent and severe incontinence you may be able to get funding to help cover some costs of continence products.

The Continence Aids Payment Scheme (CAPS) may be able to help. You can find out if you are eligible by going to bladderbowel.gov.au

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)

DVA manages the Rehabilitation Appliances Program.

You may get help from DVA if you hold a Gold Card or eligible White Card.

State and Territory Government Services

Some state and territory governments provide services to support people who are incontinent. This support sometimes includes continence products. These services vary between states and territories. Services may include client assessment, education and support.

Assessing if you are eligible to get funding

In most cases you will need to seek help from a health professional.

Contact the National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66 to get advice about continence services and support that may be available to you.

SEEK HELP

You are not alone. Poor bladder and bowel control can be cured or better managed with the right treatment. If you do nothing, it might get worse.

Phone expert advisors on the National Continence Helpline for free:

- advice
- resources
- information about local services.

1800 33 00 66* (8am–8pm Monday to Friday AEST)

To arrange for an interpreter through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), phone 13 14 50 Monday to Friday and ask for the National Continence Helpline. Information in other languages is also available from continence.org.au/other-languages

For more information: continence.org.au, pelvicfloorfirst.org.au, bladderbowel.gov.au

* Calls from mobiles are charged at applicable rates.

