

BRIDGE

FREE

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Ask your pharmacist



Don't let it hold you back

Managing leakages has never been easier. Check out the range of products designed to help – so you can concentrate on getting the most out of life >>



An Australian Government Initiative

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Letter from the Editor



Bridge is the official magazine of the National Office of the Continence Foundation of Australia (CFA). Its aim is to improve the understanding of incontinence (poor bladder or bowel control) for Australians from all age groups and all walks of life. Incontinence is a significant quality of life issue. The Foundation, as an Australian peak body, represents the interests of nearly one in five Australians affected by this health condition, their carers, family and clinicians.

What is the Continence Foundation?

The Continence Foundation of Australia was established in 1989 to represent the interests of Australians affected by incontinence or working in this field. A not-for-profit organisation, it is dedicated to 'promoting continence and managing incontinence'.

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Poor bladder or bowel control – also known as incontinence – affects around four million Australians, so you're certainly not alone if you're coping with this health condition.

To help you manage bladder or bowel leakage, there's a range of products on the market, so there are choices to be made. There may also be products you don't know about yet. You'll need to find the most comfortable products and the ones most suitable for your situation – and budget.

This edition of *Bridge* highlights the range of products to help with your 'social continence' – how you can stay dry with the help of continence products. Along with good professional advice, these special aids will make life easier and help you maintain an active lifestyle.

ANNE RAMUS, Editor

We need your feedback!

In our previous issue, we included a Reader's Survey form. Our thanks to those readers who replied. If you haven't completed and returned your survey form by fax or mail, we'd still like to receive your thoughts and suggestions about *Bridge*. Hearing your feedback (and understanding your experiences of having incontinence) is very important to us. You can also send us your feedback online, via the Continence Foundation's website www.continence.org.au

View from the Bridge

Are you aware of the changes to the Continence Aids Assistance Scheme (CAAS)?

For many Australians, incontinence is a major health issue, as well as an emotional and social one. It's often a financial burden too. Perhaps you're presently receiving assistance from the Australian Government towards your continence product purchase? If you're already receiving CAAS, do you know about the recent changes?

In the May 2009 Budget, the Australian Government announced the introduction of the **Continence Aids Payment Scheme (CAPS)** which will replace the CAAS on **1st July 2010**. The new CAPS will be delivered by Medicare Australia. Medicare Australia will be writing to all current CAAS clients seeking additional information in order to make the payment directly into a clients nominated bank account for their use when purchasing continence products.

You will not need to re-apply for the CAPS if you are an existing CAAS client. Because the new CAPS is not a reimbursement scheme, clients will not need to produce receipts.

The new payment scheme is being introduced to increase choice and flexibility for clients. After the 1st July 2010, clients can use product suppliers of their own choice, including specialist continence products suppliers, local pharmacies or retail outlets.

For further help and information...

The Australian Government's Department of Health & Ageing website www.bladderbowel.gov.au

If you have a specific enquiry, you can email continence@health.gov.au

If you do not have internet access, you can phone the **National Continence Helpline on 1800 330 066**

The information in *Bridge* is built around general health guidelines and basic sensible approaches and tips that might help improve your health. These guidelines cannot possibly apply equally to everyone. If you have any existing health challenges, or are wondering about any changes to your health or are concerned in any way, speak to your doctor immediately. Do not overlook or under estimate the effects of changing your diet, exercise levels or medicines.

Continence products

Along with getting good professional continence management advice, there's a range of products to help with bladder and bowel control

There are so many products on the market these days it can be confusing when selecting the ones that will be the best for you. There may be some products that you're not aware of!

Disposable or washable (re-usable) products

- Disposable pads – with or without adhesive, and with varying capacities.
- Small pads (similar to women's sanitary pads) with adhesive backs to attach to underwear.
- All-in-one disposable pull-up absorbent pants, and pants with adhesive tabs or with stud-fastening.
- Belted style pads (button-up or fixed elastic waistband or adjustable waistband with velcro tabs).
- Larger pads that wrap completely around the body, with tabs to fasten.
- Stretchy net-style pants or shorts (for comfort and security) to wear with pads of all sizes.
- Re-usable (washable) absorbent pads and pants – from a low-capacity panty-liner style through to high-volume products.
- Waterproof fitted sheets and pillow covers, and mattress and doona protectors.
- Absorbent bed pads and chair pads.
- Waterproof and absorbent mats to put on the floor (such as beside the bed).
- Urine drainage systems (catheters, including condom drainage).
- Male and female urinals or urine bottles, including types that are folded up to a very small size.
- Adhesive or non-adhesive penile sheaths or pouches (for men).

Washable products

This smaller range of continence aids can be machine washed and dried. Here are some points to bear in mind when looking for a re-usable product.

- Some people can be sensitive or allergic to disposable products so washable products may be more suitable.
- Their function might be improved if used with a disposable booster pad.
- They have a limited 'life' of a certain number of washes and will eventually need to be replaced, although some washable products have a significantly longer life than others.
- Re-usable (washable) products require less storage space than disposables – but you'll also need to keep a supply handy while products are being washed and dried.
- Mesh pants and the more lightweight garments take very little time to dry and can be used with the larger disposable or non-disposable pads.
- They will require the solids to be removed prior to washing, and may need to be pre-soaked.
- Avoid fabric softener with washable products as this decreases the product's absorbency.

Other products to make life easier

Bed protection – waterproof mattress protectors, bed overlays, doonas and pillow covers. Mattresses are expensive items and are worth protecting. Once damaged by leakage, they can become permanently smelly and discoloured.

Chair protection – small waterproof squares that cover a seat to protect chairs, or car and bus seats. They can also be taken when visiting other people's houses to protect furniture.

Floor protection – waterproof mats that can be washed and dried can be used beside the bed and help avoid soiled and smelly carpets. Beside the bed is often the place that leakage occurs.

Skin care products – dressings, cleansing solutions, wipes and washcloths, creams, cleansers, moisturisers, barrier creams and gels can help protect the skin.



Laundry products – gloves, disposal bags, cleaning and laundry detergents, deodorisers and products to minimise odours.

Equipment – includes commodes (portable toilets that can be located close to a bed) or urinals for men and women, or mobility aids such as handrails. These equipment items can help with a person's functional incontinence (see What is functional incontinence? on page 6).



Diabetes Australia

Reduce your waist. Reduce your risk. Over 800,000 Australians have been diagnosed with diabetes. The same number again may have diabetes but not know it. DIABETES ACTION is Diabetes Australia's National Diabetes Action Program's new campaign. It aims to increase awareness that a large waist circumference is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes. For more information, have a look at www.diabetesaction.com.au.



Kidney Health Australia

Did you know that you can lose up to 90% of kidney function and not know it? Ask your doctor about a kidney health check. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, are obese, are a smoker, have a family history of kidney problems, are over 50 years old, or are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, you are at increased risk. Visit Kidney Health Australia's website www.kidney.org.au or call 1800 682 531.

Continence products



Checklist: Help with choosing products

The best product is the one that suits you (and your carer). Do some research the various products before you purchase. It's also best to get some professional help with product selection (see back page – Who to talk to), so make an effort to talk to the pharmacy staff: they're well-trained to help you make the right choice.

- Does the user need to have good mobility and hand function to get products on and off? For example, products with studs or tabs can be difficult for some people – a pull-on style might be easier.
- Does the product only suit people with good feeling sensation or good eyesight? Perhaps the ability to keep one's balance is an issue (for example when putting on pants)?
- Does the product need to look and feel like regular underwear? Some people with dementia can have trouble accepting products that are unfamiliar and may constantly pull at them or remove them altogether. Some products might be more acceptable to people with cognitive problems – pull-on pants resemble normal underwear (but these tend to be a more expensive type).
- Does the product offer easy use by a person with limited hand function or strength? For example, using stretchy overpants requires a firm grasp because these pants are so close fitting, requiring some dexterity to use; also finger nails or toe nails can snag and damage the material.
- Does the product need to suit a person who is overweight or obese? Will the product be comfortable to wear, easy to manage and not so tight that it cuts into the upper leg?
- Is the pull-up product for someone with thin legs? If the 'seal' around the leg is inadequate, leakage can happen.
- Is a 'one size fits all' product unsuitable for much shorter or overweight people who may be outside the average size range?
- If the product is for a man, have you considered a pouch-style pad, or perhaps a belted pad which suits a man's pattern of absorbency better than some adhesive pads?
- If there's a need to minimise chafing and protect against leakage, a product designed for wearing with firm-fitting underpants might be the answer.
- Does the product need easy release and refastening? Alternatively, belted-style pads allow the user to hold the pad out of the way, behind the body while toileting (so they're more economical).
- Some products might require you to plan ahead for changing, for example, when out in public (carry plastic bags for later disposal) and larger pads need more storage space (for both clean and used pads). Men will need to access a cubicle for changing, not just a urinal-only toilet.
- Chafing occurs when urine and faeces are left in contact with the skin for too long. The skin of older people is not as strong – it can damage easily and be slow to heal. So products must provide security against leakage, be comfortable and stay firmly in place.
- Some products are easier handled by people with fairly good cognitive function, or good mobility and co-ordination. Your choice will need to take account of these issues, as well as the capabilities of the carer who will be cleaning and changing.
- Many product lines can be purchased from suppliers by phone or mail and delivered direct to your home, unmarked for privacy. The National Continence Helpline (1800 33 00 66) can assist with contact details of these suppliers.



National Continence Helpline
1800 33 00 66

The Helpline is a free and confidential service, staffed by Continence Nurse Advisors and managed by the Continence Foundation of Australia for the Australian Government

For help with bladder or bowel control problems across all age groups: childhood bedwetting, pregnancy and childbirth, constipation, menopause, prostate issues, aged care

www.continence.org.au

www.bladderbowel.gov.au

Continence products



Are you getting the most out of your absorbent products?

- You could be changing them unnecessarily (if they're only damp) or changing them at set times (when they may still be dry). Modern products are so efficient that they can usually be worn longer without leaking, odour or discomfort.
- Check the product's capacity – too big and there's more expense; too low and leakages can occur. You may need a higher volume product, or one that fits more securely. Some bed pads can be heavy, bulky and hard to wash – they may have a high absorbency factor that is not needed.
- Consider using light, washable absorbent pants or stretchy mesh pants with a disposable pad which can be more convenient and cheaper than full disposable pull-ups.
- You may benefit from using different types of pads for different situations. Try a heavier one at night, or for a social occasion. A lighter style may suit times when leakage may be less.
- Avoid skincare products which contain alcohol or strong perfumes that can irritate your skin. If you are using a barrier cream or moisturiser, just use them sparingly – applying too much can interfere with the absorbency of continence products.
- To assess the volume of absorbency, weigh a pad (or other product) when it is dry (to get a base weight). Then, after each leakage episode, place the product in a plastic bag, and weigh it again before disposing of it. If you record the weights over a 24-hour period this will give you an idea of the level of absorbency you need at different times. It will help you decide the correct product capacity to use.
- You may need advice to improve an associated issue with constipation or diarrhoea. Better management of overall bladder and bowel function could lessen your dependence on products.
- Obtaining sample products to trial first is a good way to ensure a product's suitability. Many companies will offer free samples.
- Are you receiving funding assistance through a government assistance scheme to help with purchase of your continence products? If not, talk to your continence advisor or phone the National Continence Helpline (**1800 33 00 66**) for information about eligibility.
- Speak to your continence nurse advisor for help when choosing a product or brand. They will know your needs and circumstances, and can steer you to the most suitable products for your needs.

Choosing products for a person with dementia or cognitive difficulties

Some products may not be suitable for use by a person with dementia, an intellectual disability or vision problems. Here is our guide to help you choose the correct products for them.

The person should be able to:

- identify the product's front from its back, and the inside from the outside
- change the product easily when it needs to be changed, and then dispose of it properly
- willing and comfortable to use the product (for example, some men may view pads as a woman's sanitary product and not want to wear them).

Some people may be very negative towards products that don't feel like their normal underwear. This is a common issue with dementia. It can be helpful if the product resembles what the person is used to wearing – so they don't notice the change as much. Washable pants can be put into the drawer where the underwear is normally kept and the person may accept the new product more quickly.

People with advanced dementia are unable to manage the net pants that hold small pads. They may also get confused when a pad falls on the floor when they go to the toilet and not know what to do with it. If using disposable products, it might be better to use the pull-up style. Assistance will be needed to get the pants on initially if they are different to what the person is accustomed to.

Most people with dementia benefit from a toileting program even if they are using continence products. This involves a reminder to go to the toilet every three to four hours – and will include some assistance if necessary.

For easier toilet visits it's ideal if people wear simple, comfortable clothing (such as skirts or track-pants) without complicated belts and buckles. That allows them to access any continence pants or pads more easily.



You are not alone...

You're not alone when it comes to experiencing incontinence – or making excuses for not seeking help. Four million Australians share the problem, yet less than 50% of people with poor bladder or bowel control seek medical diagnosis, advice or treatment.



Assessment

What is functional incontinence?

There are two types of functional incontinence: physical and cognitive.

Physical functional incontinence refers to a person being unable to manage alone because of a mobility or a physical problem. They may have difficulties moving around – so they cannot get to the toilet in time, or there may be barriers to easy toilet access. Poor lighting (especially at night) or low chairs that are hard to get out of, toilets that are hard to reach or see, or barriers like rugs or furniture can also cause functional incontinence.

Cognitive functional incontinence relates to not recognising or understanding the need to go to the toilet (for example, not remembering where the toilet is). This includes dementia, or confusion (such as being unable to get your bearings, especially in the dark), poor eyesight, poor manual dexterity (the ability to coordinate your hands and fingers), or being unable to ask for help using the toilet.

General functional incontinence can also be related to an unwillingness to use a toilet because of depression, anxiety or anger. It's important that carers carefully check for all of these physical and cognitive issues so that functional incontinence can be minimised.

In addition to functional incontinence, it's important to know whether there is an underlying health reason for the poor bladder or bowel control.



Preventing falls

An important and sometimes overlooked aspect of continence care is to protect against falling.

Falls can be very expensive – emotionally, socially and financially.

Falls are commonly associated with incontinence because a person is either hurrying to the toilet or slips on a wet surface (see the section on products that can make life easier on page 3).

A professional continence assessment

Incontinence is a complex health issue, often involving several interacting factors. Apart from help with product choice, understanding exactly what's going on with your bladder and bowel is the key to managing them better – and getting the most out of your continence products. An assessment is also necessary to show that you are eligible for funding under CAAS/CAPS (see View from the Bridge on page 2).

With a professional continence assessment, a complete picture of your incontinence becomes clear. This assessment can include the pattern and severity, any constipation problems, diet, fluid intake, exercise, skin care needs, living circumstances, health history, mobility and dexterity. It will also include medicines you might be taking for another health condition that could be causing your incontinence or making it worse.

Effective treatment and management relies on this thorough assessment. Your continence management routine or treatments can then be changed as your needs and circumstances change (see back page for continence health professionals who can help).

Getting good advice

It's important that a person who has poor bladder or bowel control – at any level of severity – gets advice from a continence clinician. They can help with treatment options, products, and daily management tips that may include very simple things you can try at home. Often a small practical hint can make a great difference to levels of comfort, to minimising anxiety, and keeping costs of incontinence as low as possible.

Some people may have had a control problem for a while, but it's never too late to get help. At any age or stage of life, incontinence is never normal. It can be improved or treated and better managed.

For many people, incontinence is permanent and/or severe. The best continence management advice is essential to get the best out of the products they purchase. Professional advice will help improve comfort, security and help minimise cost and expense.



Know your numbers

This annual blood pressure awareness campaign run by the Stroke Foundation of Australia helps people to understand the link between blood pressure and stroke. Visit: www.strokefoundation.com.au/know-your-numbers

Discreet help cards – available from the National Continence Helpline >>

For information, advice and referral on a bladder or bowel problem contact the
National Continence Helpline
1800 33 00 66

Can you please help?
I have a medical condition
and need a toilet quickly.

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Up to 95° machine wash and 70° tumble dry.

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Health Solutions

P 1300 788 855 F 1300 788 811

E customerservice@independenceaustralia.com

www.independenceaustralia.com

Who to talk to...



Every incontinence problem deserves professional advice

Don't let it hold you back: here is a list of some people you can talk to about incontinence – or concerns with your bladder or bowel.

- Your GP.
- The National Continence Helpline (**1800 33 00 66**). You can talk confidentially to one of the continence nurse advisors on this Helpline, from the comfort and convenience of home.
- Continence Nurse Advisor – has specialist training in incontinence. The National Continence Helpline staff are trained continence nurse advisors. The Helpline also has a listing of the professionals in your local area.
- Continence Physiotherapist – has completed a post-graduate course in pelvic floor rehabilitation. In many cases, doing pelvic floor exercises correctly is the best way of improving stress incontinence. There are also physiotherapists who have a special interest in continence and women's health issues. The Helpline also has a listing of the professionals in your local area.
- Dietitian – specialises in foods and nutrition. They can help with diet and fluid intake advice to improve digestive function and bladder and bowel control. Visit the Dietitian's Association website at www.daa.asn.au.
- Pharmacist – around a third of pharmacy customers have an incontinence problem. They are a valuable source of advice about products and other information.

Your GP may refer you (perhaps after some tests) to one of these specialists:

- Gynaecologist – deals with the health of the female reproductive system and can also look after women after childbirth.
- Obstetrician or Obstetrician-gynaecologist – looks after women's health during pregnancy, childbirth and after childbirth. This life-stage is an important one for prevention and treatment of incontinence (and perhaps surgery).
- Urogynaecologist – specialises in women's health conditions related to reproduction and the urinary system.
- Urologist – specialises in the urinary system, including the kidneys and bladder.
- Colorectal surgeon – specialises in the investigation, management and surgery related to the bowel.
- Gastroenterologist – specialises in diseases of the digestive tract (these can affect bladder and bowel function).

Continenence Foundation of Australia (CFA) National Office

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Continenence Foundation of Australia Resource Centres

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E cfansw@optusnet.com.au
WA T (08) 9386 9777
E info@continencewa.org.au
SA T (08) 8266 5260
E continence@dfc.sa.gov.au

For local continence services nationwide, please call the National Continence Helpline on freecall **1800 33 00 66**.

National Public Toilet Map:

www.toiletmap.gov.au

National Public Toilet Map can help you take a short or long trip by knowing the location of a public toilet nearest you. The toilet map can also be accessed via your mobile phones with web browser functions so you can access information on public toilets while you are out and about.

Funded under the National Continence Management Strategy, the National Public Toilet Map is used by a wide variety of Australians to plan short and long journeys across all states and territories.



This copy supplied with the compliments of:

National Continence Helpline
FREECALL™ **1800 33 00 66**

The Helpline is staffed by Continence Nurse Advisors who are always sensitive to the confidentiality and anonymity of callers. They provide confidential information and free brochures about bladder and bowel control problems.

The Helpline is an Australian Government initiative managed by the Continence Foundation of Australia.