The Continence Foundation of Australia is dedicated to supporting and advocating for the millions of people across the country living with, or affected by, bladder and bowel issues. But as we all know, incontinence is a global problem which is why we collaborate with the International Continence Society (ICS), World Continence Week and other overseas health organisations to reduce the stigma of incontinence and improve lives everywhere. We are very proud of the excellent reputation that the Foundation has built internationally over the past three decades and are delighted to announce that the ICS has selected Melbourne to host its annual meeting of the World’s leading experts in bladder and bowel health in 2021. A great honour indeed.

As the champions of the Australian Government’s National Public Toilet Map, we were also recently approached by the International Toilet Tourism Awards to provide our expertise on the judging panel for this year’s awards. To inspire entries, you can check out some of the cleanest, quirkiest, most creative and accessible toilet winners from recent years on page 4.

It’s always great to get feedback and we appreciate the many messages from people who have written to tell us how much they like our new 3D animation videos of the pelvic floor in action. The videos are available on our website continence.org.au and you can read about them on page 7.

This issue also features great advice on avoiding prolapse when working out, a South Australian child psychology centre helping toilet train children with autism and the Pregnancy Pelvic Floor Plan app to help keep mums dry.

Sharing personal stories reassures others they are not alone in their bladder and bowel challenges. To support our upcoming awareness campaign, if you are one of the 1 in 3 mums who wet themselves, have had surgery or have an inspiring continence story to share regardless of your gender or age, please drop me a line at bridge@continence.org.au

Happy reading.

Jodie

Jodie Harrison, Editor
What is chronic pelvic pain? Can it lead to more than physical symptoms?

Chronic, or persistent, pelvic pain is pain that is experienced between the belly button and the buttocks and has gone on for more than three months. It is pain that is investigated by doctors and it is difficult to find a cause to explain it. That can be a very trying experience and patients can be told there’s nothing wrong with them, which can make them even more anxious and worried. It would be more correct to say that there is no pathology that can be detected on scans or blood tests to explain the pain. But this sort of pain is related to sensitive nerves rather than some pathology that you can put your finger on and cut out or take antibiotics for.

There is no question that it is very real. This lack of a diagnosis can cause huge emotional stress because patients can be led to believe that it is ‘in their head’ or they are faking their symptoms.

How is it thought that pain in the pelvis or pelvic organs starts?

Often it is not clear why or how the pain started or what triggered it, until you dig deep for an explanation. There may have been an infection, like a urinary tract infection or a viral infection that has since resolved, or maybe a period of stress in someone’s life that can lead to the nerves in the pelvis becoming ‘sensitised’ or firing off spontaneously.

Anxiety is often part of the mix. The person may have suffered with anxiety before the pain started but the whole experience of having pelvic pain will make anxiety worse and hard to cope with.

What is the relationship between pain and the brain?

That’s an interesting question because without the brain there would be no pain. The brain processes all the information at its disposal, via nerves coming from the body: the organs in the pelvis, the gut, the muscles and from other areas in the brain. These other areas in the brain will remember past bad experiences or fearful memories. If the brain concludes that all of these messages indicate that the organism (ie. the person) is under threat or in danger, then it switches on pain. Other things also happen to protect us—like our muscles tense up and we go on high alert. That adds to the experience and can increase a person’s suffering.

It’s not wrong to say that pain is made by the brain—but it doesn’t mean that pain isn’t real! It is very real and certainly not imagined.

How can the pelvic organs such as the bladder, bowel and pelvic floor muscle cross over and ‘talk to each other’ about pain?

The pelvis is a busy place with plenty of nerves connecting the organs: the bladder, the bowel and in women, the uterus and the vagina. This rich network of nerves coordinates how we urinate, defaecate and orgasm—all at the appropriate times and places!

Let’s not forget the pelvic floor muscles, which support and control all these organs. These muscles have the potential to tense up too, to protect us. So they can be tense and tender, for example around the vagina, making intercourse painful, or in men, causing pain between the testes and the anus (this area is called the perineum). This muscle pain can be hard to diagnose because the muscles are hidden from view and can only be tested by internal examination from a trained health practitioner, often a pelvic floor physiotherapist. An important message here is that pelvic floor muscles need to relax as well and it’s not all about tightening them, even if you suffer from incontinence.

What kind of help and treatment is out there for people experiencing bladder, bowel or pelvic pain?

It is really helpful to have a supportive team of health professionals, as well as family members or friends, who all understand chronic pelvic pain and can work together to help you.

The team might have different people in it depending on what the problems are. Maybe it’s more about the bladder, or the gut, or the muscles, or with anxiety - and it’s often all of these.

That makes for a lot of suffering when daily things like sitting down, sex, or emptying your bladder or bowel all cause pain. But it is possible to get your life back on track, especially when the entire team works together. I’ve seen some amazing results with happy outcomes. For people who don’t have access to this sort of help, there are some excellent resources online.
In search of WORLD’S BEST TOILETS

Clifftop conveniences with a view, accessible artworks with added purpose, public rest stops that become tourism attractions – these are among the contenders for the 2019 International Toilet Tourism Awards.

Toilets can make or break a holiday and Australian co-founder of the awards, Carolyn Childs, said this sentiment was the inspiration for starting what has become a global movement.

“In focus groups, over and over, the importance of toilets as part of the holiday experience kept coming up – especially for road trips. Our aim is to get destinations to recognise the importance, invest in great toilets and celebrate the innovation it drives,” said Carolyn.

The Continence Foundation of Australia has partnered with the 2019 International Toilet Tourism Awards in search of the best clean, quirky, creative, accessible and environmentally-sound public toilets.

“We are delighted to be working with the Continence Foundation of Australia, who champion the Australian Government’s National Public Toilet Map and will be part of judging this year’s Awards,” said Carolyn.

The National Public Toilet Map is perfect for planning those important toilet stops on road trips. It is both a website and smartphone app, providing the locations and details of over 19,000 toilets around the country.

Here is a glimpse of previous winners of the Toilet Awards. If you know a toilet that deserves recognition, entries are open until 1 May at surveymonkey.com/r/ToiletTourism2019.

THE CUMMINS MOSAIC LOO, CUMMINS, South Australia
Tourists now seek out the rest rooms converted from a former railway station block, which feature statues, mosaics and paintings reflecting a more genteel bygone era from the early 20th century.

HOTEL LA JOLLA, California, USA
Sitting on the 11th floor overlooking La Jolla and the sea, the restroom offers a breathtaking view of the coastal urban village of La Jolla and the Pacific Ocean off San Diego.

THE SASKATCHEWAN SCIENCE CENTRE, Canada
Inspired by the boreal forests of northern Saskatchewan, there are floor to ceiling visuals of the deep forest and audio of birdsong and woodland sounds.

BRISBANE AIRPORT, Australia
Brisbane Airport’s upgraded accessible toilets have been designed to exceed accessibility legislation. Dedicated ‘Changing Places’ facilities allow for specialised equipment such as an adult change table, hoist and a toilet with removable hand rails for people with severe disabilities.
Thanks to the Tuggeranong Men’s Shed, we had our own classic outdoor dunny for World Continence Week and the 2018 National Conference on Incontinence. Bridge makes great reading material!

Thanks to the National Public Toilet Map, Australians can breathe a sigh of relief with the location of more than 19,000 public toilets around the country easily at hand. Download the smartphone app or visit toiletmap.gov.au, enter your destination or location and you will be provided with details of all the nearby toilets, opening hours, baby change facilities and disability access. The online tool is a great way to help plan your trip - by providing the start and finish points, you will be given locations of all the toilets along the way.

**BOWL PLAZA, Kansas, USA**

Bowl Place showcases detailed mosaics created by local residents and artists. The building is shaped like a toilet tank, the entrance is shaped as the lid and the sidewalk ‘flows’ from a toilet roll.

**TRANGIE CARAVAN PARK, New South Wales**

The ‘Dump Point’ outdoor toilet is certainly quirky, but maybe not ideal for the shy toilet-goer.

**THE JAMES BOND LOOS at Piz Gloria, Switzerland.**

The Piz Gloria restaurant and visitor centre has embraced a James Bond theme since the location was used as Blofeld’s Lair during filming of *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. The toilet experience is complete with James Bond sound effects and mirror visuals.
Pregnancy Plan app to help keep you dry

The statistic is confronting: 1 in 3 women who have ever had a baby wet themselves. But don’t despair, pelvic floor muscle exercises during pregnancy may help you stay dry.

The Pregnancy Pelvic Floor Plan app is there to guide you to protect your pelvic floor in pregnancy and beyond. And best of all, it’s completely free—with no pesky ads. You can put in a due date and the information will be tailored to your milestones.

Why is strengthening your pelvic floor muscles important?
The softening effect of the hormone relaxin and the increasing weight of your baby places pressure on your pelvic floor muscles. This can make it harder for the muscles to hold your pelvic floor organs in their correct position. The pelvic floor muscles and ligaments are also stretched at birth, which can sometimes lengthen the tissues permanently.

Daily reminders to do your pelvic floor muscle exercises cut through the ‘baby brain’ and can be set at convenient times of your choosing.

The Pregnancy Pelvic Floor Plan smart phone app was developed in conjunction with The Pregnancy Centre and with input from women who are currently pregnant or have recently had a baby.

Search for the Pregnancy Pelvic Floor Plan app on the App Store and Google Play on your smart phone or device.

* Please note when searching for the app on an iPad select ’iPhone only’

Pregnancy Pelvic Floor Plan app

➔ Tips on looking after your pelvic floor, bladder and bowel during pregnancy
➔ Learn how to do pelvic floor exercises and receive reminders
➔ Information about safe exercise during and after pregnancy
➔ Health and wellbeing tips
➔ Find local services for pelvic floor problems
➔ Enter your due date to receive timely information

More information
National Continence Helpline
1800 33 00 66
continence.org.au

Supported by funding from the Australian Government under the National Continence Program
Strong pelvic floor muscles are vital for bladder and bowel control as well as good sexual function, but most people never exercise them correctly ... and some don’t know how they work.

Locating the right muscles to engage is the first step and it’s often the trickiest. To make it simpler, the Continence Foundation of Australia has developed 3D video animations that give a unique look at the male and female pelvic floor in action.

CEO of the Continence Foundation of Australia, Rowan Cockerell, said the new 3D animations are a creative way to help people visualise how pelvic floor muscle exercises prevent and treat bladder and bowel leakage.

“Doing daily pelvic floor exercises is not only the best method to prevent incontinence, it is often the cure that over 5 million Australians living with bladder and bowel problems are desperately looking for.”

The animations are free to watch online at continence.org.au. The videos show you exactly how the pelvic floor moves and supports the bladder, bowel and other pelvic organs. They also play an important, but often forgotten, role in sexual sensation and function.

Once you understand what the pelvic floor muscle looks like, you’ll understand the importance of pelvic floor muscle exercises for continence. The exercises have been shown to be effective in preventing and treating incontinence – regardless of anyone’s age or gender.

Bill Di Blasio, Managing Director of 360South – the digital agency that designed the videos, said creative methods of health education like these animations work well.

“Creating 3D models of the human body is invaluable in helping people visualise and better understand their physical workings to help them in the recovery and prevention of life altering conditions. Although the creation of the models can be complex, the benefits to each person are priceless,” Bill said.

Pelvic floor physiotherapist, Associate Professor Irmina Nahon, highlighted the importance of proper education about pelvic floor muscle exercises.

“Doing these exercises incorrectly is at best wasting time and at worst, making bladder or bowel issues more problematic. Or if they were not appropriate for an individual, it could result in pain,” Dr Nahon said.

“Previously I have used 2D pictures, but they are much harder for my patients to relate to. With these animations you can see how the pelvic floor moves forward, inwards and up,” Dr Nahon said.
AVOIDING PROLAPSE WHEN YOU ARE WORKING OUT

When you think of injuries from working out, the pelvic organs and floor muscles might not be at the top of your list. But in fact, the pelvic floor is like any other muscle and can be placed under strain.

Lisa, from Western Australia, was 39 and had been active her entire life: growing up on a farm, hiking, swimming, running after her two boys. She had never entered a conventional gym but wanted to tone up and do something different, so she joined a small gym for a six-week weight training challenge.

She was loving the new way of exercising and felt confident that the personal trainer was taking the time to teach technique and individually monitoring the small number of participants in the course - all mums.

Lisa kept at her weight training, which included extremely heavy squats, and after the course had completed she kept going to the gym three times a week. It was a real shock when about five months later, she noticed a bulge after having sex. As it often happens, ‘Doctor Google’ was the first port of call and Lisa started “freaking out” a bit. She headed to the GP and then a gynaecologist, where she was told she had bladder, uterine and rectal prolapses.

WHAT IS PELVIC ORGAN PROLAPSE?

The pelvic organs include the bladder, uterus (womb), large bowel and rectum (back passage). These organs are held in place by support tissues called ‘fascia’ and ‘ligaments’. The pelvic floor muscles support your pelvic organs from below.

Without strong support, pelvic organs may bulge down into the vagina. This is called prolapse.

She was told the weight training could have contributed to the prolapse because of the downward pressure on the pelvic floor. Lisa also had the risk factor of childbirth, which is the main cause of prolapse. As her two kids were into their teens, prolapse wasn’t something that crossed her mind.

Her training regime dangerously increased in load. By the end of the six-week course, she had accelerated to squatting 100kg.

Lisa had diligently followed her trainer’s instructions, which focused on breathing and the core but never the pelvic floor.

“I naturally thought the core was the same as the pelvic floor. It never entered my mind that it was different,” Lisa said.

Marietta said properly explaining and protecting the pelvic floor in a training context is important but can be difficult.

“She felt like many others do, that ‘heavier equals stronger’. But upon reflection, she would’ve approached weight training with a different attitude.

“It’s not about much weight you’re squatting, it’s about going out there and giving it a go,” Lisa said.

“I wish I took more time to know what my body was doing on the inside, rather than what I was doing for it on the outside.”

Marietta Mehanni, fitness professional and Pelvic Floor First Ambassador, said taking it slowly is vital when exercising.

“The gold standard is that the individual is aware that they have lifted their pelvic floor prior to performing the exercise. The only definitive way to know at this point is to have a pelvic floor physio perform an examination to check if the pelvic floor is engaging appropriately and then applying this knowledge with other exercises,” Marietta said.

It took experiencing prolapses for Lisa to see a continence physiotherapist. She wasn’t aware of such a specialty before. She’s found it invaluable and even said the physiotherapy eased her existing back pain.

Strong pelvic floor muscles are vital for prolapse prevention and exercising them can help if you already have a low-grade prolapse. There are also many approaches available to treat prolapse once it has happened, including good bladder and bowel habits, pessaries, and various surgical approaches.

Nearly a year on from her prolapse diagnosis, Lisa is on a waiting list for a hysterectomy and vaginal approach surgery.
Prolapse has taken a toll on many parts of her life, including both physical and emotional. It has made her sex life different and she struggles using tampons, as well as suffering from an overactive bladder that doesn’t empty properly. She’s had to give up running, which she loved, and swapped it for long, low impact walks on the beach.

For more information on prolapse and its signs, causes and treatment, visit www.bit.ly/ProlapseBrochure online or phone the free and confidential National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66.

The Pelvic Floor First website pelvicfloorfirst.org.au has information on how to do pelvic floor muscle exercises and tips on modifying fitness exercises to suit those at risk of, or experiencing, pelvic dysfunction.

Q How should I speak to my personal trainer/instructor about making sure exercises are modified for the pelvic floor?

A Some personal trainers and instructors are knowledgeable about exercise and the pelvic floor and others are not comfortable or familiar with the information. Ask specific questions like: “Do you teach pelvic floor safe options?”, “Have you done any pelvic floor and exercise specific training and where?” You could also ask if they modify exercises for other clients re pelvic floor. A big red flag would be if they responded with a “no”. This would suggest that they are not experts in this area and it would be appropriate for you to seek another trainer.

- Marietta Mehanni

Research: Intermittent Catheter Quality of life survey

Do you use an intermittent catheter to empty your bladder?
Are you aged 18 or over?

Hollister Incorporated is conducting this global research project in order to gain a better understanding of the catheter user. This is a comprehensive survey; it includes attributes like; quality of life, social connectivity, UTI management, emotional aspects of life and other areas. Please help represent Australian I.C. users in this international research by completing the survey:

Link to survey: www.bit.ly/HollisterICSurvey

If you would like to know more, please contact Hollister Continence on freecall: 1800 880 851 or Local Survey Investigator: Paris Purnell, Snr Mgr Global Clinical Ed. Mobile 0438 366 992 or email paris.purnell@hollister.com

Suite 3, Ground Floor 990 Whitehorse Rd, Box Hill VIC 3128 www.hollister.com

Ethics Approval ETHLR.18.044
Are you entering the NDIS or renewing your plan?

BrightSky Australia supports people with disability and their NDIS needs by providing healthcare products and claiming directly with the portal or working with plan managers so you are not out-of-pocket or over budget.

We offer a comprehensive range in:

- Continence
- Nutrition
- Mobility Equipment
- Wound Care, Skin Care and other specialist healthcare products

All proceeds from BrightSky go towards helping people with physical disability and their support network

☎ 1300 88 66 01
✉ ndis@brightsky.com.au
✉ www.brightsky.com.au
National Continence Helpline Manager, SUE BLINMAN answers some frequently asked continence questions.

**Q** I am a 62-year-old lady with no bladder problems, but I’m wondering if I’m too old to start pelvic floor muscle exercises?

**A** You’re never too old. If you’re willing to listen and learn how to do the exercises, then your continence health professional is there to help you as well. I have taught these exercises to people in their 90s with great success.

My message to everyone—male or female and of any age—is to learn how to do these exercises and then continue to do them for life. The Continence Foundation of Australia has just released excellent 3D animations of the pelvic floor. In just two minutes, this model allows you to visualise your pelvic floor and see exactly what it is, where it’s located and why it is important to train this hidden group of muscles.

**Q** My 6 ½-year-old son is fully toilet trained both day and night, however, he does have occasional soiling with his bowels. When he goes to the toilet he has a good bowel motion—which is usually every second day. The soiling has never happened at school until last week. I’m very concerned that he will be bullied if this happens again. What can I do to help him?

**A** Even though he is having a bowel motion every second day, he may have constipation. About one to three per cent of children can have this problem and some of them may have wetting as well. It is more common in boys. Soiling may vary from a ‘skid mark’ to larger amounts that need to be removed from underwear before it can be washed.

Seek medical help. Your GP is a good place to start if you are concerned about your child’s bowel habits or soiling.

Make a diary of all your child’s bowel actions and accidents for a couple of weeks and take this with you when you see the doctor. Request a Choose Your Poo chart to assist your child in providing details about the motions by contacting the National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66.
GRANT HELPS TOILET TRAIN KIDS WITH AUTISM

A Continence Foundation Community Health Promotion Grant gave Beanstalk Child Psychology in Adelaide the chance to provide a free toilet training workshop.

Beanstalk is an NDIS provider of early intensive behavioural intervention for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Adelaide.

Susan Petrie, psychologist and Beanstalk Director, emphasised what access to a free workshop can mean for kids, their parents and carers.

“Achieving continence is a significant developmental milestone for any child, and especially for children with ASD. Our one-on-one toilet training programs designed for children with ASD are intensive, and therefore can be cost-prohibitive for some families without funding. This grant allowed us to help our whole community, not just one family at a time,” - Susan said.

Beanstalk found that principles of applied behaviour analysis helped their children learn quicker and so started using the same method for teaching toilet training. They’re eager to pass this knowledge on and the demand is high.

“Due to our growing client base of 130 NDIS participants, we get requests from parents and carers every week on how they can toilet train their children.”

“When these parents are given a step-by-step process of what to do and have access to certified professionals who can walk them through it, there is a greater chance of success,” Susan said.

If your community group is interested in applying for a grant for an initiative to promote healthy bladder, bowel or pelvic floor habits, head to continence.org.au/communitygrants.html or email grants@continence.org.au.