

NATIONAL AGEING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Tips on Healthy Ageing

Urinary Incontinence

Urinary Incontinence affects one in 20 Australians (across all ages), and women are more likely to be affected than men. In older Australians, urinary incontinence is more common, affecting 1 in 10 over the age of 75, and generally more severe.

There are several types of urinary incontinence:

- Stress incontinence – the leaking of small amounts of urine when coughing, sneezing, straining, lifting or playing sport.
- Urgency incontinence – the sudden need to urinate that is hard to suppress.
- Overflow incontinence – where the bladder empties very poorly and the urine may just spill out.
- Functional incontinence – where a physical, mental or environmental problem affects the person's ability to reach the toilet in time.

There are different causes for incontinence including factors outside the bladder system, for example, due to mobility/dexterity impairment, diabetes, medications, constipation, obesity or brain disease. Local causes include childbirth, prostate disease, and urine infection.

Effective treatment or management depends on a proper diagnosis. See your GP or a continence advisor for a proper diagnosis and appropriate treatment plan.

Good bladder habits:

- It is normal to go to the toilet 4-6 times a day, and once or twice at night.
- Drink at least 6-8 cups of fluid a day (unless advised otherwise by your GP).
- Limit intake of caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, chocolate) and alcohol, they irritate the bladder.
- Go to the toilet when your bladder is full and you need to go; don't get into the habit of going "just in case".
- When urinating, don't rush, take your time and allow your bladder to empty completely.
- Keep your bowels regular and avoid constipation (straining can weaken the muscles of your pelvic floor).

Regular pelvic floor exercises can keep the tone of your pelvic floor muscles strong. Brochures are available from the National Continence Foundation Resource Centres. <http://www.continence.org.au/site/index.cfm?display=112563>, or call the National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66

The National Continence Helpline, 1800 33 00 66 (freecall), can provide you with more information about urinary incontinence (or bowel problems) and provide contact details for your nearest Continence Clinic.

Compiled from information from the Continence Foundation of Australia and the Royal Melbourne Hospital – Royal Park Campus - Continence Clinic. September, 2009