

Facts & Figures About Continence

Poor bladder and bowel control is a common health condition that impacts on the quality of life of many Australians. Incontinence can interfere with enjoyable social activities, paid and voluntary work, healthy exercise and sport, travel and relationships.

Research tells us that 3.8 million Australians are coping with incontinence at some level - nearly 20% of the Australian population - and over 70% are women. The main reason women are the most affected group is that incontinence is strongly linked to pregnancy, childbirth and menopause.

Incontinence affects:

- 19% of females aged 10-29 years
- 40% of women aged 30-44 years
- 50% of women aged 45-59 years
- 30% of women aged 60-74 years

Because of embarrassment or shame, many people don't want to talk about incontinence, even to their GPs. It's even more of a taboo topic if bowel (faecal) incontinence is involved. It's kept hidden or perhaps dismissed with statements like "it's because I've had children" or "it's only a small problem" or "it's just a problem of age". While these can be understandable responses, they're untrue: so-called small problems have a habit of getting bigger, pregnancy and childbirth might be factors but something can always be done and age is no barrier to treatment or improvement. Most importantly, dismissive responses stand in the way of people seeking expert advice.

Being guided by a clinician is far better than merely coping alone or guessing. Expert advice can include simple things you can do at home, the range of treatment options available, or finding products that suit you best.

If absorbent products or other aids are being used, there's help with choosing the most comfortable, easiest to handle or the most cost-effective, or information about eligibility for funding scheme assistance, for example; Incontinence can be an expensive health condition, especially if you're using a lot of continence products.

Incontinence is a health problem like any other, yet is frequently "in the background" of many other major conditions. But incontinence deserves equal attention. It's a complex condition which often involves more than unwanted leakage from bladder or bowel - it can also be associated with constipation, diarrhoea, toilet frequency and urgency, haemorrhoids and embarrassing flatulence (wind).

Incontinence left untreated or poorly managed will usually get worse, often slowly over time, eroding quality of life often in quite subtle ways. These days, there's a lot that can be done to ensure that incontinence has the least impact on our emotional, social and financial wellbeing.

The National Continence Helpline

1800 33 00 66 ... helping consumers and carers

Talk to a Continence Nurse Advisor about your bladder or bowel control problem (The Helpline is a free and confidential service managed for the Australian Government by the Continence Foundation of Australia)

References:

Anne Ramus -

Continence Foundation of Australia (www.continence.org.au) and

Di Edmonds - Physiotherapist with a special interest in Continence and Women's Health, Director/Founder of The Pregnancy Centre (www.thepregnancycentre.com)