Continence
A guide for carers

- Top tips for managing incontinence
- Bladder & bowel weakness explained
- Looking after yourself
Especially for carers

This booklet has been created for people who care for a loved one with bladder and / or bowel weakness. It offers practical tips and insights on understanding incontinence and ways to support and care for those with incontinence.

It’s common

Over 4 million Australians experience bladder problems¹. About 4 per cent of all adults and 25 per cent of women over 40 have suffered from some form of incontinence.

Anyone at any age can suffer from bladder and bowel weakness, although it’s more common in the elderly. Having a problem with bladder or bowel control is a symptom, not a disease. It can often be cured and almost always be managed.

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1 Source: Australian Institute of Health & Well-Being, Canberra 2006.

“ Incontinence can often be cured and almost always be managed. ”
As a carer

Incontinence is often linked to other health conditions, with many carers having to buy and give medications, change/fit continence products, and provide a diet with adequate fibre and fluids.

You and the person you’re caring for may feel uncomfortable about some of the tasks involved in incontinence care. It’s important to talk about it and try to maintain a positive frame of mind. Professional help and advice is recommended, with services available to support continence management tasks with dignity.

The level of help your loved one needs might be light assistance, or total care – which can be quite demanding and draining.

Caring for your family member or friend may seem to be the top priority, but it’s important you look after yourself as well. Don’t ignore your own needs and feelings. While coordinating doctors’ appointments, giving medications, bathing, lifting, transferring, dressing, feeding, toileting and dealing with incontinence-related activities might not leave you with much time, it’s vital to look after your own physical and emotional wellbeing.

Give yourself credit for a job well done, stay healthy, connected with friends and maintain your own interests and hobbies. By caring for yourself, you’ll be a better care provider.

How your loved one might feel

While incontinence can put pressure on you as a carer, it can have devastating effects on your loved one – emotionally, psychologically and socially. People suffering from bladder and/or bowel weakness may be seen as lazy or attention seeking. Sufferers may feel ashamed, embarrassed, annoyed, angry, frustrated or guilty. If not well managed, incontinence can lead to social isolation and alienation, with the person feeling like an outcast. It can also result in skin complaints.

When talking with your loved one about incontinence, let them know that with help from their doctor, the problem can be managed. The aim is to prevent or at least minimise incontinence episodes, and to manage it to maintain your loved one’s dignity.
Incontinence explained

**Continence** is the ability to exercise voluntary control over natural impulses such as the urge to defecate or urinate.

**Incontinence** is the complaint of any involuntary leakage of urine or faeces.

The type of incontinence your loved one suffers from will influence the treatment.

**Types of urinary incontinence**

- **Stress incontinence**
  Urine leakage following physical movement such as coughing, sneezing, lifting, bending, laughing or playing sport.

- **Urge incontinence**
  A sudden desire to urinate, without enough time to make it to the toilet.

- **Reflex incontinence**
  A loss of urine without bladder sensation, due to damage to nerves which control bladder function.

- **Overflow incontinence**
  Where the bladder does not empty properly, perhaps due to outlet obstruction or constipation.

- **Functional incontinence**
  Where a person’s ability to reach or use the toilet is compromised, perhaps due to poor mobility, loss of memory or poor building design.

**Urinary incontinence contributing factors**

Often the main reason for bladder control problems is either weak pelvic floor muscles or the signal that indicates the bladder is full being interrupted on its path to the brain.

Contributing factors may include:

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Urinary infections
- Side effects from medication
- Prescribed or natural diuretics including caffeine
- Chronic constipation
- Bladder stones and other obstructions
- Neurological disease or injury eg, Parkinsons, stroke, spinal cord injury
- Diabetes
- Menopause
- Prostate gland surgery
- Obesity

**Faecal incontinence**

Faecal incontinence is the involuntary evacuation of the bowel, and can also include loss of wind and faecal smearing.

Constipation is one of the most common causes of faecal incontinence in the elderly and disabled. Other causes can include diarrhoea, environmental issues such as inability to reach the toilet, neurological impairment, nerve or muscle damage and cancer of the rectum or anal fissure.
Your loved one’s doctor will work to diagnose and offer treatment options. A team of health care professionals may be involved such as a continence nurse advisor, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, dietician and other medical specialists.

The more information you provide, the better equipped the medical professional will be to develop a plan for solving or managing the problem.
Where to seek help

For who you’re caring for

Encourage your loved one to talk to their doctor if they’re experiencing bladder or bowel weakness.

Other helpful sources of information include:

- depend.com.au for men and women with moderate to heavy bladder and bowel problems
- Women with light to moderate bladder leakage can access valuable information at poise.com.au
- Information about children’s bedwetting is available at drynites.com.au
- bladderbowel.gov.au
- The Continence Foundation of Australia – continence.org.au
- The National Continence Helpline freecall 1800 330 066 (8am to 8pm (AEST) Monday to Friday)

For yourself

If you’re caring for someone with incontinence – particularly with medium to high care needs – don’t be afraid to ask for help yourself. Sources may include family and friends. Be specific about chores and days and times people can help. Keep a list of current tasks that need to be done – such as grocery shopping, cooking, mowing the lawn – so when a friend or relative says ‘just let me know how I can help’ you can share the list with them.

Respite care might be available to give you a break from care responsibilities. This may include hiring of private caregivers, home healthcare organisations or adult day care. Local community residential facilities or nursing homes might offer limited stay admissions if you need a slightly longer break.

You could ask your local community centre or continence nurse advisor if there’s a support group in your area, where you can meet other caregivers and share your experiences.
Financial assistance

Many people with bladder or bowel weakness use incontinence products such as pads, pants, catheters or bedding protection to manage their condition – and the financial costs can add up.

There are various subsidy schemes for continence products, funded by the Australian Government and State/Territory Government Departments. For example, the Continence Aids Payment Scheme (CAPS) pays over $500 a year for continence products to people five years of age or older who have permanent and severe incontinence due to an eligible condition.

The various schemes have differing eligibility criteria and funding allocations. Your loved one may even be able to apply for Government funding through several schemes.

Eligibility information is available from the National Continence Helpline freecall 1800 330 066 or your local continence clinic.
**Top tips for managing incontinence**

**Toileting – When to go**

It’s much better to hold on until at least the third urge to pass urine rather than rush to the toilet straight away or to go ‘just in case’. This allows the bladder muscle to get stronger and hold more without emptying. ‘Bladder training’ is when a person delays going to the toilet after feeling the urge to urinate. They might start delaying their toilet visits by 10 minutes, then over time gradually increase the wait.

With the bowels it’s a different story. When the urge to open the bowels comes, it’s important to go to the toilet straight away. Avoiding or putting off opening the bowels means the urge will disappear until a later time – possibly the next day. The longer faeces stays in the bowel, the harder and drier it becomes, resulting in constipation. Constipation can contribute to urinary incontinence, as the faeces in the bowel presses on the bladder causing urine to leak out.

Scheduled bathroom trips might be helpful – rather than just waiting until an urge strikes. Going to the toilet after meals can help promote bowel motions, as this timing maximises the normal body mechanisms of muscular contractions in the digestive system.

**Positioning on the toilet**

A squatting position is more ideal than sitting. Experts believe this is a more natural way to completely empty both the bladder and bowels.

The lower back should be straight, not slumped and the legs comfortably apart with the feet supported. Having the legs comfortably apart may require clothing to be pulled down to the ankles so the thighs are not pulled towards each other.

The individual may lean forward, back or remain upright depending on what allows the bowels to open with the least effort.

Some find it helpful to have the knees raised higher than the hips with the use of a small footstool. If so, it’s important the footstool be stored behind the toilet to avoid it being a safety hazard and its use should be discouraged for those with mobility, balance or other medical issues where leaning forward to arrange the stool may not be safe. Ensure the footstool is not too high that it encourages slumping of the lower back.
If the person you’re caring for has difficulty sitting on the toilet, consider adding a toilet seat extender that raises the seat height to a more comfortable level. Wall hand rails may also make things easier. If they’re confused, you may also consider other ways of making the toilet more accessible such as keeping the toilet light on and placing an identifying notice or picture on the toilet door.
Top tips for managing incontinence

Bladder emptying tips

People with underlying bladder disorders may find double voiding helpful to ensure the bladder is fully emptied. Sit on the toilet in the ideal position and pass urine. Count to 10 and then pass some more urine. The extra urine passed is the residual that’s stored as a result of the bladder’s inability to push it all out.

If it’s still difficult to completely empty the bladder, consider using the Credé maneuver while double voiding. This is where pressure is applied over the bladder from the ball of the hand or fist while passing urine.
Exercise
An important component of promoting continence is exercise – general exercise for total body, bowel and bladder health, and pelvic floor exercises.

Weak pelvic floor muscles are the most common cause of bladder weakness. Pelvic floor exercises are recommended for women and men who experience any degree of urinary leakage.

Pelvic floor exercises
There are two different types of exercises, and they can be done anywhere, anytime – sitting, lying or standing:
1. Pulling up and holding or tightening as if stopping the flow of urine.
2. Clenching or tightening the buttocks together, as if stopping wind escaping from the anus.

Pelvic floor exercises are best done after emptying the bladder:
- Tighten the muscles and hold for 3–5 seconds. When the muscles get stronger, tighten for 10 seconds or longer.
- Relax for 3–5 seconds, then tighten them again.
- Do 3–5 of these exercises at a time, at least three times a day.

Fluid intake
It’s important to consume 6–8 glasses of water a day to maintain bladder capacity and prevent dehydration. Some people withhold their fluid intake as they don’t want to have a urinary accident but this can prevent the bladder muscles from being toned and also result in concentrated urine, irritating the bladder.

If the person you’re caring for finds it difficult to drink 6–8 glasses of water daily, consider other options like fruits, vegetables, wet foods like curries and stews, soups and jellies which are high in water content and much easier for the body to digest and absorb.

Reduce or avoid alcohol and caffeine beverages like coffee, tea and cola soft drinks. Caffeine-containing fluids can irritate the bladder and cause it to draw water from other parts of the body to dilute the caffeine. This can result in dehydration and constipation. Citrus juices can also irritate the bladder so health professionals suggest just one glass in the morning. Alcohol decreases the ability to co-ordinate the act of holding on before going to the toilet.

Watching weight
Carrying excess body weight can aggravate bladder or bowel weakness by putting stress on muscles.
Diet

Drinking cranberry juice is encouraged to help with urinary tract and bladder health. Avoid foods that are spicy as these can irritate the bladder and make bladder management more difficult.

A high fibre diet is vital in maintaining bowel regularity. If the diet is too low in fibre, or the amount of dietary fibre is increased without increased fluid intake, constipation will occur – and this can contribute to urinary incontinence.
Finding solutions

Ways to treat or manage incontinence will depend on the type and cause of your loved one’s bladder or bowel weakness. Some treatments are quite simple and inobtrusive. For more severe cases, treatment may include:

- **Biofeedback** To help them identify and control the muscles located around the bladder opening, through use of small sensors placed on their body, or
- **Medication** Prescribed alone or in combination with behavioural treatment, or
- **Surgery** As a means of treating a physical condition.

Aids and products

There are a variety of aids and products to help manage leakage and maintain the dignity of the person you’re caring for. A doctor or continence nurse advisor can help with selection.

When choosing the most appropriate and effective aid consider:

- Your loved one’s type of incontinence,
- Their amount of bladder or bowel leakage,
- Their independence level – physical ability, mobility and hand function
- And the personal preference of your loved one plus, if you’ll be required to help with use of the aid, your own personal preferences.

The effectiveness of the chosen aid should be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Aids may include:

- Disposable absorbent products – eg, pads, pants
- Disposable wipes
- Reusable products – eg, waterproof pants, retaining garment for pads
- Bed protection
- Commodes – chair with a built-in toilet pan which can be placed beside the bed
- Hand held urinals – urine collection devices for men, for women
- Bedpans
- External collection devices for men – eg, penile sheaths, dribble pouches

A continence advisor can help suggest the right product.
Hints for better care

✔ Clothing
Young children or older people may find Velcro and elastic waistlines easier to undo or remove than zippers and buttons. Looser fitting clothes are easier to manipulate and make continence product use more discreet. Keep a change of clothes and underwear handy in case of a mishap.

✔ Hygiene & skin care
Be careful to cleanse the skin between product changes to maintain skin integrity and reduce potential for skin breakdown.

✔ Prevent odours
Dispose of used continence products in a container with a fitted lid or in a sealed bag. Wash soiled linen and clothing regularly.

DEPEND®, POISE® and DryNites® disposable continence products are designed to neutralise odour.

Disposable absorbent products
A variety of disposable products are available, developed especially for incontinence protection. Some have adhesive backing, some are pads worn with firm fitting underwear or stretch pants, others are designed like underwear. Some provide protection for bowel weakness.

DEPEND®, POISE® and DryNites® are ranges of comfortable and effective disposable continence products available in a variety of styles, sizes and absorbency levels.

Disposable product selection should be based on the level of absorbency, product type, size and fit.
Sourcing product

DEPEND®, POISE® and DryNites® disposable products are available from a variety of sources. You’ll find some products in supermarkets and pharmacies, while others are available only through distributors.

These distributors can arrange home delivery of products. Contact them directly to find out more:

**Independence Australia**

independenceaustralia.com

Phone: 1300 788 855
Email: customerservice@independenceaustralia.com

**Intouch Direct**

intouchdirect.com.au

Phone: 1300 134 260
Email: healthcare@intouchdirect.com.au

**BrightSky**

brightsky.com.au

Phone: 1300 886 601
Email: info@brightsky.com.au
# Choosing the right protection

Help selecting the right product is available using the interactive product selector tools at depend.com.au and poise.com.au

## Increasing absorbency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very light (just in case)</th>
<th>Light (eg. leakage when laugh, cough, exercise)</th>
<th>Moderate (Frequent light leakage – holds 1-2 cups)</th>
<th>Maximum (Over 2 cups. Some suit bowel incontinence)</th>
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<td>Microliners</td>
<td>Light</td>
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<td><strong>Depend® Pads (formerly Depend® Shields)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Depend® Flex</strong></td>
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## Light protection

**For women**

**POISE® Liners**
- Regular 3 times more absorbent than period-only liners
- Breathable

**POISE® Active**
- Microliners: 3 times drier than period-only liners
- Designed for active women
- Discreet & comfortable

**For men**

**DEPEND® Shields for Men**
- Thin & discreet
- Secure cup-like protection

**Moderate protection**

**For women**

**POISE® Pads**
- Soft side shields help stop leakage
- Dry touch cover
- Contoured shape for better fit & protection

**For men**

**DEPEND® Guards for Men**
- Wider front end for male anatomy gives excellent protection
- Adhesive strip ensures secure protection
- Cup-like shape for better fit
- Comfort-flex leak barriers to protect while active

**For Children & Smaller-Framed Adults**

**DryNites® Pyjama Pants**
- Gender-specific designs for better protection
- Look and feel like real underwear
- Cloth-like outer cover reduces noise during movement

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Continued...
Moderate protection

For women and men

DEPEND® Pads (formerly DEPEND® Shields) (only available through distributors)
- Extra long for greater protection
- Soft, cloth-like cover for comfort & skin health
- Adhesive backing strip secures in place
- For bladder & bowel incontinence

DEPEND® Undergarments with Buttons
- Easy product removal & attachment
- Soft breathable cover
- Can be fitted while sitting, standing or lying
- For bladder & bowel incontinence

For women

DEPEND® REAL FIT® Underwear for Women
- Slim & comfortable, looks & feels like real underwear
- Feminine peach cotton-like stretch fabric
- Absorbent core zoned for women
- All-around leg elastics

Maximum protection

For men

DEPEND® REAL FIT® Underwear for Men
- Slim & comfortable, looks & feels like real underwear
- Masculine blue cotton-like stretch fabric
- Absorbent core zoned for men
- All-around leg elastics

For women

DEPEND® REAL FIT® Underwear Super for Women
- Slim & comfortable, looks & feels like real underwear
- Feminine peach cotton-like stretch fabric
- Absorbent core zoned for women
- All-around leg elastics
- Super absorbency for maximum protection

For women and men

DEPEND® Underwear Unisex (only available through distributors)
- Underwear-like waistband
- Soft & comfortable
- All-around leg elastics
- Traps & locks in odour
- Available in Super and Super Plus absorbencies
For women and men

**DEPEND® Anatomic Pads**
(only available through distributors; worn with DEPEND® Stretch Pants)
- Soft, cloth-like outer cover with full-length wetness indicator
- Longer side leakage guards boost protection
- Dry-lock core keeps wearer dry & reduces odour
- Breathable design for optimum skin health

**DEPEND® Stretch Pants**
(only available through distributors; worn with DEPEND® Anatomic Pads)
- Washable, re-use up to 30 times
- Highly breathable, comfortable, latex-free
- Easy to put on & remove

**DEPEND® Briefs**
(only available through distributors)
- Can be fitted while sitting, standing or lying
- Soft, cloth-like outer with full-length wetness indicator
- Convenient, refastenable tabs
- For bladder and bowel incontinence
- Breathable design for optimum skin health

**DEPEND® Flex**
(only available through distributors)
- Breathable belt
- Advanced odour protection
- Easy-use, secure re-fastening system
- Cloth-like cover optimises comfort & skin health

**DEPEND® Cleansing Wipes**
- Pre-moistened cleansing wipe ideal for continence care
- Large size (20 x 30cm) for full coverage
- Thick & strong so won’t tear in use
- Soft, hypoallergenic & dermatologically tested

**Other protection**

**DEPEND® Underpads**
- 55 x 40cm
- Fluid-proof protection for beds, chairs etc

**DEPEND® Booster Pads**
- Use with other DEPEND® products to increase absorbency by up to 240mL
- Super thin so discreet
- Odour protection for increased confidence
Free product sample


or tick the product/s you’d like below (max. 2 per household).
See pages 16 to 19 for product details.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Absorbency Options</th>
<th>Size Options</th>
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Mail in a stamped envelope to:
Depend® Offer
PO Box 784 Brookvale NSW 2100

Title ___________________ Name __________________________________________________________
Postal Address _______________________________________________________________________
Suburb ____________________________________________________________________________
State ______________________ Postcode __________________________
Email __________________________
Gender □ Male □ Female Year of Birth _________________ □ Tick this box if you do not wish to
be contacted by Kimberly-Clark Australia with further promotions.
Phone __________________________

For more information on DEPEND®, POISE® or DryNites® products, bladder or bowel
weakness or to order a FREE PRODUCT SAMPLE, call 1800 028 334 or visit our websites

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