



PROMOTING CONTINENCE CARE

Understanding urinary incontinence in adults

Produced by Synergy Healthcare
as part of their commitment to promoting
continence awareness

The urinary system

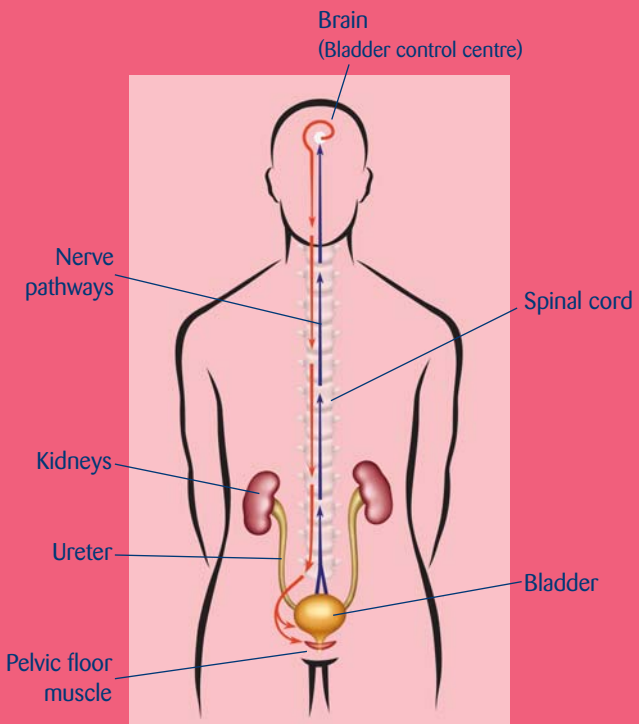
The kidneys act as a filter, taking the waste products (urine) from the blood into the bladder via the ureters. The bladder is a muscular sac which stores urine until we are ready to go to the toilet. It is situated in the pelvic cavity in the lower part of our body.

When we get the feeling of wanting to pass urine, the bladder sends a message to the brain via the nerve pathways. The brain then sends a message back to the bladder controlling the passing of urine until there is a toilet available.

When we empty the bladder the sphincter muscle, at the base of the bladder relaxes and the urine passes out of the body via the urethra.

The pelvic floor muscle is a "sling" of muscle which supports all the organs in the pelvic cavity, (i.e. bladder and bowel in the male; bladder, bowel and womb in the female) and plays a large part in helping to control our bladder.

An average bladder will hold between 400 - 600 mls of urine (approximately 1 pint) and empty between 4-7 times a day. However the frequency of bladder emptying varies from person to person.



Urinary incontinence causes both distress and embarrassment and often leads to isolation.

Research shows that there is an estimated six million people in the UK with bladder problems. It can affect any age group, from children to the elderly, male and female, the disabled as well as the able.

No-one likes to talk about incontinence and people are often reluctant to seek help.

However, it is a well known fact that 70% of people with incontinence can either be cured or have their problem significantly improved.

Even if the problem does not clear up there are many ways of coping with it, improving your quality of life and allowing you to continue with your normal daily activities.

This leaflet provides brief information which explains:

- **How the urinary system works**
- **The different types and causes of incontinence**
- **The treatment, help and management available to you**
- **The organisations useful for support.**

The definition of continence

“Being continent means the ability to pass urine or faeces in a socially acceptable place at a socially acceptable time.”

To remain continent you must be able to:

RECOGNISE the need to pass urine
IDENTIFY the correct place
REACH the correct place
HOLD on until you get there
PASS urine when you get there

If a person has a problem with any of the above it could lead to episodes of incontinence.

Some of the

Stress incontinence

Stress incontinence is a leakage which occurs when you laugh, cough, sneeze or exercise. It is most common in women and can occur during or after pregnancy; after the menopause; and sometimes when you are overweight. It can however occur in men following a prostate operation.

The pelvic floor muscles, which support the pelvic organs (including the bladder) are often stretched and weakened during pregnancy and after childbirth. This could lead to a leakage on exertion.

Hormones cease to be produced after the menopause. This sometimes causes the vagina, urethra and surrounding tissue, to become sore and dry and affects the closure mechanism of the sphincter muscle at the base of the bladder.

Being overweight can put a strain on the pelvic floor muscles.

MANAGEMENT

- **Pelvic floor exercises will help to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles.**
- **A course of hormone treatment can also help.**
- **Occasionally surgery is required.**



most common and causes of

Urge incontinence

Urge incontinence is experiencing a sudden need to empty the bladder and not being able to get to the toilet in time. This is often associated with frequency i.e. the need to go to the toilet more often than usual during the day and the night.

The most common cause is urinary infection.

Urge incontinence may occur for no apparent reason. It may result from anxiety or confusion; or from a neurological disorder such as diabetes, Parkinson's disease or a "stroke".

Urge incontinence does not always mean that you will become incontinent. It will however affect those people with a mobility problem, particularly the elderly and the disabled.

MANAGEMENT

- **Bladder retraining is developing the skill to "hold on" a little longer each time you feel the need to go to the toilet.**
- **Medication from your Doctor might also help you to achieve this.**

Other types of incontinence:

Nocturnal enuresis (bed wetting)

This can occur in the elderly due to the extra blood supply to the kidneys at night and the reduced production of the anti-diuretic hormone.

Functional incontinence

Occurs when a person has poor mobility and is not able to reach the toilet in time or if their environment does not suit their needs.

n types incontinence

Overflow incontinence

Overflow incontinence is when the bladder remains full and does not empty properly. It is sometimes accompanied by a poor flow of urine and constant dribbling.

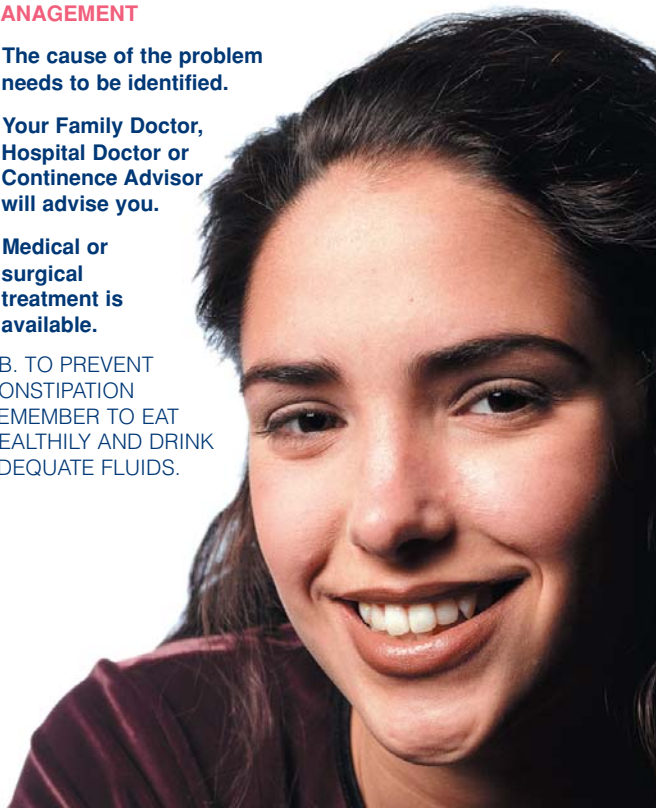
These symptoms usually occur in men with an enlarged prostate gland or in someone who is experiencing severe constipation so restricting the passage of urine from the bladder.

Overflow incontinence can also occur when there is a neurological disorder present such as diabetes.

MANAGEMENT

- **The cause of the problem needs to be identified.**
- **Your Family Doctor, Hospital Doctor or Continence Advisor will advise you.**
- **Medical or surgical treatment is available.**

NB. TO PREVENT CONSTIPATION REMEMBER TO EAT HEALTHILY AND DRINK ADEQUATE FLUIDS.



Additional influences on the bladder

Sometimes the medication you are taking can affect your bladder control.

The amount of fluids you drink and what you drink will influence your bladder habits.

It is important that your daily fluid intake is adequate (at least three pints).

Tea and coffee can produce symptoms of urge and frequency due to the caffeine content. Alcohol will produce an effect similar to that of a diuretic (water tablet).

Too little fluid intake can lead to constipation and even cause urinary tract infections.

Those suffering from Dementia or Alzheimer's Disease fail to recognise the need to go to the toilet and their bladder habits become inappropriate.

People who can help

For many people incontinence is not caused by just one thing but can develop for a number of reasons and vary with each person. It is therefore important, if you have a problem, to seek help from your Family Doctor, your local Continence Advisor, District Nurse or Health Visitor.

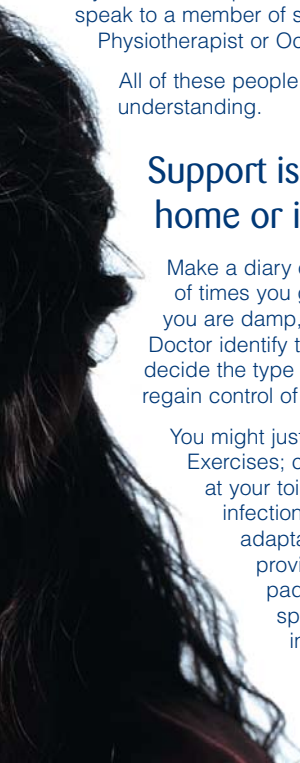
If you are in Hospital or a Nursing Home/Residential Home, speak to a member of staff; the Doctor looking after you; the Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist.

All of these people will treat you with dignity and understanding.

Support is available whether at home or in hospital

Make a diary of your bladder habits i.e. the number of times you go to the toilet day and night; when you are damp, wet etc. This information will help the Doctor identify the extent of your problem and help to decide the type of support necessary to help you regain control of your bladder.

You might just require advice for Pelvic Floor Exercises; changing your drinking habits; looking at your toilet habits; treatment for a urinary infection; assessing your current medication; adaptations to your home environment; provision of special equipment, including pads and pants; or even a referral to a specialist in the hospital for further investigations or surgery.



National Organisations available for Information.

The Continence Resource Centre Helpline for Scotland
0141 201 1861

Continence Foundation Helpline
020 7831 9831

Incontact
020 7700 7035

Incontact provides information and support for people affected by bladder and bowel problems.

PromoCon
0161 834 2001

PromoCon offers impartial, unbiased information about continence products and services.

Your local continence advisor is:

Written by:

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Other leaflets available include:

- Pelvic floor muscle exercises for women
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises for men
- Bladder training
- Incontinence and skin care

Produced by Synergy Healthcare as part of their commitment to promoting continence awareness.

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