

Continence

Bladder and bowel control is an important part of life. This control is called continence; a lack of bladder or bowel control is known as incontinence.

For some people with disabilities, learning and maintaining bladder and bowel control can be very challenging. Difficulty with continence can range from minor problems through to no control, causing accidents or involuntary loss of urine, faeces or wind from the bowel at any time.

Some people find they have problems develop as they get older. While it is common to have more problems, it is not a part of getting older. For women who have had children, while it can be common to have increased problems, it is not normal to have problems long term.

If you ever experience a sudden onset of a lack of bladder or bowel control, this is serious and could be a medical emergency. Seek urgent medical advice.

Supporting incontinence

It is important to remember that having a physical or intellectual disability doesn't necessarily mean an individual will be incontinent. While those with more severe or complex disabilities are more likely to

be incontinent, many people with disabilities achieve at least some level of bladder and bowel control.

It is important for those supporting people with disabilities to be aware of the needs of the person you are with. Needs may range from personal care support, to physical and timely access to bathrooms at home and out in the community. Incontinence products should only be used when an individual requires them, not because their use is convenient for those supporting them.

Health professionals can provide advice and guidance for those experiencing any problems with continence. All professionals understand the very personal nature of continence and will provide a supportive, individualised plan.

- The Continence Foundation of Australia is an excellence resource. The Foundation's website offers information for individuals, advice for those who support people with disabilities and details funding options for products. continence.org.au

- Speak to your GP for ongoing support
- Occupational therapists can provide support to achieve bladder and bowel control during childhood
- Physiotherapists can assist in maintaining good bladder and bowel health through control of the pelvic muscles, as well as helping to improve general mobility to physically access and make the distance to the bathroom in time
- Continence nurses provide support in maintaining good bladder and bowel health and can offer assistance in identifying the best methods, services and products to suit an individual's needs

Speak to your planner about funding available for products and the services required to support you to improve your continence or to manage your incontinence.

Visit futurethinking.abilitycentre.com.au for more information.