



# Info-Link Sheet

## Plumbing & Incontinence

### Women's Information and Referral Service

1800 817 227

Older Women Out There is a wellness project for women living in rural and remote areas. It is coordinated by NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network and funded by the NSW Department of Health

### What is Urinary incontinence?

*Incontinence is where you can't control the storage or release of urine, so that it is released without you wanting it to.*

It can be embarrassing and causes emotional, physical and social problems because of the current stigma that surrounds this issue; so many suffer in silence. But incontinence is a medical condition that should be able to be discussed with close friends and family just like any other health problem such as diabetes or asthma.

One in twenty of all Australians suffer from incontinence. However, it is thought to be much higher, with a large number of cases being unreported. It is more common in older groups, and it tends to be worse. In the over 75 year old age group, over 40% of people suffer from incontinence.

### How do I know if I have incontinence?

If you suffer or experience any of

the following signs or symptoms, this might indicate that you are suffering from some form of incontinence:

- \* You go to the toilet greater than 6 times a day
- \* You get up greater than once during the night to pass urine
- \* Feel a sudden and desperate urge to go to the toilet and then sometimes, not being able to control this urge, so that you may wet yourself before you get to the toilet ?
- \* Find that you may wet your underwear after you cough, laugh or do any exercise
- \* Incontinence is not a disease; it is a symptom that can have many causes and it is treatable.

### Why people don't seek help?

In people affected by incontinence, less than 40% ever seek help. But what reasons would prevent someone from seeking help?

- \* embarrassed or ashamed
- \* affects an activity of our daily lives that we keep personal to ourselves and it is normally

done in private

- \* still a taboo subject "not something we talk about"
- \* think you are the only person who has the problem
- \* don't want anyone to know that you have a problem
- \* think it is normal for them to have such problems eg. after having a baby, or a just because they are old.

Sufferers commonly delay seeking help despite the major effect on their quality of life and that of their families. It is estimated that about 850,000 adult Australians are affected. Despite the large number of people with incontinence and the various solutions available, society's negative attitudes about bladder control problems can cause a person to become isolated and alienated from friends and peers for fear of discovery and social embarrassment.

Urinary incontinence should never be considered normal. It is always a symptom or sign of an underlying problem.



## What is the cause?

There are several types of urinary incontinence, each with a number of possible causes. Events or activities such as the ones listed below, may cause these muscles to be weakened, thus leading to urinary incontinence:

- \* pregnancy or childbirth
- \* constipation
- \* heavy lifting
- \* obesity
- \* chronic coughing
- \* lack of fitness
- \* menopausal hormonal changes

## What is something I can do to help?

### *Pelvic Floor Exercises:*

The pelvic floor muscles play an important role in bladder and bowel control. These exercises don't involve any money, all it involves is just some of your time!

### *Locating the correct muscles:*

1. First of all, sit or lie comfortably with the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and abdomen relaxed.
2. Tighten the ring of muscle around the back passage as if you are trying to control diarrhoea or wind. While you are doing this, try not to tighten your tummy, buttocks or thighs. Now relax it.
3. Practise that movement several times until you are sure that you are exercising the correct muscle.

These exercises involve the repeated contraction and then subsequent relaxation of the muscles mentioned above. These exercises should be performed on a daily basis and they should be associated with normal daily activities such as brushing your teeth, just before you go to bed etc, so that they become a routine part of your day. It is important to do these exercises properly, as half-

hearted exercises will not be beneficial to you. To help prompt you to do the exercises, you should do them with other things, such as after brushing your teeth, just before you sleep etc. Also remember that if you ever have any problems with the exercises, you can consult a physiotherapist or incontinence nurse or general practitioner.

For more detail on the pelvic floor exercises and how to actually do them, please consult a Continence Foundation of Australia Fact Sheet on Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women and Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men, which you can obtain from your local Continence Resource Centre.

## Assistance and Resources

There are many health professionals qualified to assist you with bladder control problems so ask your doctor.

### *Continence Foundation of Australia.*

This is an organisation that specialises in dealing with continence issues. They can provide you with further information and names of continence advisers or specialist health professionals in your area. They are also a FREE service. Continence Promotion Centre 18 Ross St, Parramatta North 2151, Ph 02 9630 0477, freecall

1800 069 789,  
[www.som.fmc.flinders.edu.au](http://www.som.fmc.flinders.edu.au)

Most of the information provided here has been taken from an excellent web site produced by medical students at Monash university: <http://yoyo.cc.monash.edu.au/~pegasus/index.htm>

### More Information

*Women's Information and Referral Service (WIRS) freecall 1800 817 227*

WIRS is a free & confidential telephone service for all women in New South Wales and is part of the Department for Women. WIRS can help you find information that you, your family or friends may need from anywhere in NSW from Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 5.00pm. If you ring after hours or on the weekend you can leave a message and someone will phone you back.

If you are deaf or hearing impaired you can contact WIRS on their TTY number 1800 673 304. For their translating and interpreting service call 131 450.

*This info-link sheet has been compiled by NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network as part of the Older Women Out There project. For more information contact the Rural Women's Network on Ph (02) 6391 3620, Fax (02) 6391 3650, Email <[allison.windus@agric.nsw.gov.au](mailto:allison.windus@agric.nsw.gov.au)>*

