

# Health

## Bladder questionnaire

- Do you have to rush to use the toilet?
- Do you plan your daily routine around where the nearest toilet is?
- Do you sometimes feel you have not completely emptied your bladder?
- Are you frequently nervous about where you think you might lose control of your bladder?
- Do you wake up twice or more during the night to go to the toilet?
- Do you leak before you get to the toilet?
- Do you leak when you laugh or sneeze?
- Do you leak when you lift something heavy?
- Do you leak when you play a sport?
- Do you leak when you change from a sitting or lying position to a standing position?

Answering yes to any of these questions may indicate that you have a bladder management problem and should talk to a healthcare professional.



**Continence Foundation of Australia** | NATIONAL CONTINENCE HELPLINE  
**1800 33 00 66**

## Q&A INCONTINENCE

**Q:** What's normal for the bowel?

**A:** *What's normal for one person can be very different for someone else. What you need to be on the lookout for is any change in your normal bowel habits. For example, if you normally move your bowels once a day and suddenly you're only going every three days, then that could indicate that there is an issue and it would be good to speak with your GP.*

**Q:** Will reducing my fluid intake help manage my incontinence?

**A:** *No. Drinking less in an attempt to control the bladder function actually has the opposite effect. If you drink less you can become dehydrated, aggravate your bladder and end up urinating more frequently.*

**Q:** I've heard of good bladder habits, what are they?

**A:** *Good bladder habits can help prevent incontinence. They include things like maintaining adequate fluid intake (1.5 - 2 L per day), eating a healthy diet, limiting your caffeine intake and establishing a good toileting regime.*

## Incontinence: It's time to talk

Incontinence is on the rise and now affects one in four Australians of all ages and genders.

According to the Continence Foundation of Australia, over five million adult Australians are suffering in silence from a health issue that can be treated, managed and in many cases cured.

An embarrassing and sometimes painful problem, incontinence can lead to anxiety, depression, social isolation and other serious health issues. While the condition is generally curable, unfortunately only 30 per cent of people with a problem seek help.

Any accidental or involuntary loss of urine from the bladder, or faeces or wind from the bowel can be classified as incontinence. According to the continence service team at Castlemaine Health, people often keep quiet about it because they're embarrassed or misinformed.

"Many of the people we see who suffer from this condition assume it's just a normal part of ageing or having a baby and they just have to live with," says Annie McMurray, nurse and member of the continence team.

"They don't talk about it, even with their partners."

"But incontinence is not normal. When we tell people how common it is and how easily it can be treated they're genuinely shocked. You can see the relief as they realise - it's not just me."

Talking about it is something the continence team want to encourage people to do: with friends, with family, with colleagues.

"If you're feeling alone, chances are others around you are as well," Annie says.

It could also be time to connect with the continence service at Castlemaine Health, a confidential, self-referral service available to anyone in the Mount Alexander Shire.

The continence service offers individual consultations for women and men, advice, strategies and support all delivered by trained continence nurses and physiotherapists. They can help with management strategies, advice on fluid intake, bladder and pelvic floor training and rehabilitation, as well as assistance with aids and appliances. They also do home visits.

"The service is all about empowering people and helping them become more independent," says Jo Kepsner, nurse and continence service coordinator.

"We set them up with strategies and provide the education and support they need to manage their condition."

"Incontinence can be debilitating and lead to other serious health issues," Jo says.

"People with this condition experience high levels of anxiety and depression. They're at a higher risk of falls, infections and skin risks are common and frequent soiling can compromise hygiene."

"There's a lot of misinformation out there and because people tend to keep it to themselves they could actually be making things worse. We're there to help."

Continence physiotherapist Wendy Cumming agrees. Wendy often works with patients with weakened pelvic



floor muscles which may be caused by childbirth, chronic constipation, chronic coughing or heavy lifting.

"When these muscles are weak the pelvic organs are not fully supported and can lead to difficulty controlling the bladder and bowel," Wendy says.

"You can strengthen and rehabilitate your pelvic floor with the right technique and a specific exercise program."

"We sometimes see people who've started an exercise program with all the best intentions but have ended up making the problem worse. We can conduct a pelvic floor assessment and get them started with safe, effective exercises."

"When it comes to incontinence, even a tiny change can make a huge difference," Jo adds.

"We've seen this service turn people's lives around and we'd encourage anyone who is experiencing symptoms or knows someone who is to contact us."

**For information and referrals contact:**

**Intake Office Community  
Rehabilitation Centre (CRC)  
Castlemaine Health**

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**Jo Kepsner, continence nurse, Wendy Cumming, continence advisor/physiotherapist and Emily Maddern, continence nurse advisor from Castlemaine Health.**

Send us your questions or tips about health and wellbeing

Write to us to have your question or tip featured here.

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