

# Incontinence after stroke

## What you need to know

- › Incontinence is common after stroke.
- › Your treating team can help find out what is causing your incontinence and give you treatment.
- › There are strategies, aids and continence products that can make life easier.

## About incontinence

Incontinence is poor control of your bladder or bowel. After a stroke, physical changes as well as communication and vision changes, can lead to incontinence. Changes to your thinking, memory and judgement can also lead to incontinence. Incontinence can also be caused by changes to your diet, along with some medications.

## Types of incontinence

**Frequency.** You need to go to the toilet very often.

**Functional incontinence.** You are incontinent because you have trouble getting to the toilet on time or at all. You may need help to go to the toilet and may have difficulty communicating this. You may have trouble getting your clothing undone in time.

**Urge incontinence.** A sudden and uncontrollable need to pass urine which may result in you wetting yourself.

**Urinary retention.** You are not able to fully empty the bladder. It also happens when you hold an increasing amount of urine in the bladder.

**Nocturnal incontinence.** You need to go to the toilet several times during the night.

**Faecal incontinence.** Leakage from the bowel results in you soiling your underwear.

**Constipation and diarrhoea.** These problems can also cause incontinence.

## Assessing continence

Incontinence can be treated, managed and cured. The first step is a full assessment by health professionals.

Your health professional will ask you about how well you could control your bladder and bowels before the stroke. They will look at how your stroke has affected you. They will also consider things like what you eat and drink, your medications and how much you exercise.

Tests you may need include:

**Bladder scan.** An ultrasound shows how well your bladder is emptying and if it is painless.

**Urine tests.** You pass urine into a small jar. The sample is checked to see if there is an infection.

**Rectal examination.** A doctor feels inside your rectum for any abnormalities.

**Bladder and bowel diary.** Keeping a diary of how much you drink, how much fluid you pass and how often.

After your assessment, your health professionals will work with you to develop a plan to manage and improve your incontinence.

## Products that can help

Products that can make going to the toilet safer and easier include raised toilet seats, rails on the wall, commode chairs and portable urinal bottles. Your occupational therapist, nurse or continence nurse can help you with these.

There are a number of products that can help you stay dry and comfortable. These include pads, liners, pants and absorbent underclothing. Mattress protectors and water-resistant doona covers and bed sheets can also help.

You can buy some of these products at your local supermarket, chemist or specialist retailer. For more significant problems, you may need to purchase products from a medical supply company.

The National Continence Helpline can advise if you are eligible for financial assistance for continence products.

## Other things you can do

A dietitian can help you get the right balance of fibre and fluid in your diet. If you increase the fibre in your diet you may need to increase the fluid you drink too.

Drink up to eight to ten cups of fluid a day. Water is best.

This can help stop bladder irritation and make it easier to pass faeces.

Try to reduce your intake of drinks that make you need to go to the toilet more often. This includes drinks with caffeine such as tea and coffee.

Set up your toilet and bathroom so you can get in quickly and safely. Wear clothing that can be undone quickly.

Before you leave hospital make sure:

- You know how to manage your incontinence.
- You can access any continence aids you may need.
- You know about follow up appointments you may have.
- Your family know about your difficulties and the plan to manage them.

## Get help

StrokeLine's nursing and allied health professionals can give you information, advice and support.

StrokeLine is a free, confidential and practical service.

Open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm Australian Eastern Time. StrokeLine is closed on National and Victorian public holidays.

Call **1800 787 653**

Email [strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au](mailto:strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au)

Join Australia's online stroke community with videos, fact sheets, resources and support for stroke survivors, their family and friends.

Visit [enableme.org.au](http://enableme.org.au)

**Continence Helpline**

Call **1800 33 00 66**

Visit [continence.org.au](http://continence.org.au)

## About us

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

## Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

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