

pamphlets on incontinence in Vietnamese, Chinese, Italian, Macedonian and English, and a booklet on good bladder control in Chinese, Italian, Vietnamese, Arabic, Russian, Spanish, Turkish and English.



English
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Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

Solutions for common bladder problems

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
website: <http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>
e-mail: mhcs@doh.health.nsw.gov.au
phone: (02) 9382 8111

NSW HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

35-year old Mira wanted to spend more time getting herself into shape now that her children were all at school. But when she joined a local exercise class, some exercises made her leak urine, so she stopped going. 52-year-old Gina has a similar problem when she's shopping - she suddenly feels an overwhelming urge to urinate and begins leaking urine before she can get to the toilet on time. She's begun wearing pads to avoid "accidents".

There are thousands of people like Gina and Mira in Australia who let incontinence interfere with their lives, either because they're too embarrassed to get help or they don't realise help is available. Some people think incontinence - which affects one in 20 people of all ages in Australia - is a normal part of being a woman or a normal part of ageing. But incontinence (which can affect men too) is never normal and can usually be cured or at least improved.

Mira, for instance, has stress incontinence which means a person leaks small amounts of urine when they cough, sneeze, laugh, lift something or play sport. It happens because the muscle supporting the bladder becomes weakened and can't keep the bladder closed. This weakening is usually caused by pregnancy and childbirth, by being very overweight or by "straining" a lot because of chronic constipation. This problem can get worse around menopause when hormonal changes can also affect muscle tone.

Gina has urge incontinence - besides "leaking", she also needs to go to the toilet frequently including two or three times each night. This problem is often the result of going to the toilet too often instead of "holding on". Think of your bladder as a bag which can expand to hold as much as 500mls of liquid - but if you keep emptying it when it only contains 150ml or 200ml, it gets so used to holding only small amounts that it

shrinks. This means that even if it's holding just a little urine the bladder feels very full. Alcohol and drinks containing caffeine (coffee, tea and cola), can irritate the bladder and make the problem worse.

Other problems include:

- **Overflow incontinence** - this is when the bladder has difficulty emptying and urine dribbles out. In men, it's often caused by an enlarged prostate gland.
- **Reflex incontinence** is when someone urinates with no warning that they need to go to the toilet. This is usually caused by damage to the nerves which control the bladder and can affect people with spinal injuries.
- **Faecal incontinence**. Leaking faeces is less common than urinary incontinence, but very distressing. It's often caused by constipation and has a very high cure rate.
- **Bedwetting in children** It's normal for young children to wet the bed occasionally, but if it happens frequently over the age of six, it's good to get some advice, especially if a child starts wetting the bed frequently after being "dry". Other reasons for getting advice are if the bedwetting is upsetting the child, interfering with his or her social activities, or if the child asks for help.
- **Don't be shy about getting help** Most problems can be simply treated (it may be just a question of learning how to train your bladder to hang on for longer, or of doing simple exercises to strengthen muscles). To find a health professional who can assess the problem and help solve it, contact your doctor or community health centre, or ring the Continence Foundation of Australia on Free call 1800 069 789 (or write to GPO Box 9919 in your capital city). The Foundation has registered nurses who can talk to you confidentially on the phone, and can arrange for an interpreter, if necessary. The Foundation also has