

## Incontinence pads and alternatives

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net).

This leaflet provides information and guidance on products available to help manage incontinence when this has not been successfully treated.

### Pads

Incontinence pads absorb any urine leaked from the bladder. There are large selections of washable and disposable products available with differing levels of absorbency to deal with all levels of incontinence. The NHS provides a range of high absorbency disposable pads for significant incontinence; it does not provide small, low absorbency pads. Absorbency varies according to the pad selected, up to a total absorbency of 800-2500ml/2-5 pints. Wetness indicator strips suggest changing at 40% of this, which is at a working absorbency of 400-950ml/1-2 pints. Not everybody will meet the criteria for pad provision. Your bladder and bowel specialist nurse can advise.

Washable products use multiple layers to keep the wearer dry and deal with odour, and are obviously more environmentally friendly. Washable products may be appropriate and more 'normal' to wear for some people. They come in a variety of styles and absorbencies.

Disposable pads have a one way liner which protects the wearer's skin and a core that locks urine in to deal with odour. Many have wetness indicator strips showing when the pad requires changing; this is when it has reached its working absorbency.

Both washable and disposable pads can be very absorbent and do not need to be changed until capacity is reached.

Incontinence pads may be helpful but sometimes get in the way complicating or hampering the process of passing urine for people with some disabilities.

Unfortunately, pads, even when very absorbent, cannot accommodate emptying a full bladder (e.g. 1 pint/0.5 litre) all at once. The pad cannot absorb large quantities of urine fast enough to prevent leakage onto clothes or furniture. Emptying the bladder 2-3 hourly in the toilet will reduce the quantity of urine leaked at any one time, thereby reducing or avoiding these incidences. It is normal to need to empty your bladder up to seven times in any 24 hour period.

Unfortunately pads cannot absorb faeces. A soiled pad must be changed as soon as possible and the skin cleaned. Eating stimulates gut activity and the 'call to stool'. Therefore, sitting on the toilet within 30 minutes of meals can allow stools to be caught in the toilet preventing faecal accidents and help preserve a person's dignity. There are anal inserts or plugs available which some people find helpful in preventing faecal accidents when out and about. These are available on prescription.

For men there is a selection of sheaths available. These are worn over the penis and collect leaked urine into a bag attached to the leg. There are other urinary collecting devices available e.g. AFEX system (adhesive free external collection system for men) and Bullen pants, both have a small bag attached to the pants and are useful for small urinary leaks. Some of these are available on prescription. AFEX also have a night system.

There is an external urinary catheter available for women who are not mobile. It can be used whilst the person is lying in bed or sat in a chair, but not when walking around. Unfortunately this product is new and not yet available on prescription.

Urinary catheters are not recommended to manage urinary incontinence because they can cause discomfort, urinary infection and other side effects. They are a foreign body and can be rejected by the bladder. They are usually used when a person is unable to empty their bladder and cannot intermittently catheterise.

There are washable bed and chair pads, waterproof mattress and duvet covers available to purchase. Mobility shops in local towns will stock or obtain these for you alongside urinals for men and women, including ones suitable for travelling (some are available on prescription). They also stock larger pads than are normally available from chemists and supermarkets.

The Independent Living Centre can also provide advice on clothing with simple fastenings and aids to get in and out of bed, chair etc.

Website: [www.independentlivingcentre.org.uk](http://www.independentlivingcentre.org.uk)

Tel: 01392 380181

## **Healthy bladder and bowel**

Please remember it is important to look after yourself and your bladder and bowel.

1. Drink adequately i.e. 1.5-2 litres / 3-4 pints of a variety of fluids per day. When this is difficult to achieve, eat plenty of high water content foods e.g. cereals with plenty of milk, fruit, vegetables, custards, yogurts and ice cream.

The human body and brain has high water content; fluids are essential to maintain good health and body function. Without adequate fluid intake you are likely to feel lethargic and tired and will be more prone to urinary infections. Concentrated urine can also be more irritating to the bladder leading to urgency and frequency of urination.

2. Eat healthily i.e. five to ten fruit and vegetables daily (include some skins where possible) and fibre-rich bread and cereals. Fibre maintains regular bowel action and prevents constipation and/or diarrhoea.

For more information, please visit NHS website:

- 30g a day fibre intake – [www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-get-more-fibre-into-your-diet](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-get-more-fibre-into-your-diet)
- Eat well healthy plate – [www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide)

3. Maintain some exercise e.g. walking

Eating stimulates gut action and the subsequent mass movement of stool into the rectum which initiates the 'call to stool'. Denying this call regularly can lead to constipation. Lack of exercise can slow the gut and cause constipation.

## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple  
Devon EX31 4JB  
Tel. 01271 322577  
[www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk)

© Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.  
Tel: 01271 313970 / email: [ndht.contactus@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.contactus@nhs.net)