

Continence and You



An information leaflet
for young people with
spina bifida and/or
hydrocephalus

Wouldn't you like
to be in control?



Not being able to control your bladder or bowel is probably one of the hardest problems you face.

Many people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus do manage to work out a routine which helps them stay clean and dry.

Bladder control



There are lots of reasons why your bladder needs to be emptied regularly. Most important is the need to prevent infection and to keep your kidneys healthy. A routine which works well will keep your skin dry and so help stop pressure sores.

And remember, if your clothes or skin have urine on them, even for a little while, that won't make you smell very nice. So regular washing and changing your clothes is very important.

Helpful hints

- ◆ **Drink plenty of fluids** to keep your wee clear and your kidneys healthy.
- ◆ **Don't have too many drinks which contain caffeine such as coffee, tea or Coke.** Caffeine upsets the bladder which may lead to more infections. Drink fruit juices, particularly cranberry juice – they are better for you.
- ◆ **Drink less beer, wine and other alcoholic drinks.** If you drink too many of these, they can play havoc with your bladder management. If you drink too much alcohol, you may forget to empty your continence bag and this might leak – causing you and your friends a lot of embarrassment.

When you go drinking with friends, order low-alcohol lager or wine. These give the taste without the alcohol. Legally, of course, you shouldn't be drinking alcohol in pubs until you are at least 18 years old.

HELP!

Different ways to empty your bladder properly can include:

- **Using a catheter.** Some people use a catheter (or tube) to empty their bladder every three or four hours. You may hear this called *Clean Intermittent Catheterisation (CIC)*.

- **Indwelling catheter.** This tube stays in the bladder all the time and drains into a bag.
- **Penile sheath** (for boys only). This fits over the penis (willy) and also drains into a bag.
- **Medicines from your doctor.**
- **Operations.** There are several different operations available to help bladder control. Ask a continence adviser or your doctor if you want to know more about these.

Bowel control



Emptying your bowel will help stop you from becoming bunged up or leaking on your underwear.

Helpful hints

- ❑ **Drink plenty!** This helps keep the stools (poo) soft, so going to the toilet is easier.
- ❑ **Eat a high-fibre diet – lots of fresh fruit, vegetables and cereals.** See ASBAH's *Go with Fibre* leaflet.
- ❑ **Exercise helps to keep your bowel fit!**

- ❑ **To help you empty your bowels at your usual time, sit on the toilet after a meal or hot drink, take a big breath and push hard.** A continence adviser could explain this more fully to you.

HELP!

Different ways to empty your bowel properly could include:

- ▲ **Enemas or suppositories.** These have to be prescribed by your doctor or continence adviser. They are put inside the bottom as high as possible and help to get things moving.
- ▲ **Medicines from your doctor**
- ▲ **Sometimes just stroking the entrance to the bottom** can help you get the urge to go to the toilet.
- ▲ **High bowel washout.** This is when you use a special tube which you put in your bottom. Water is then put into the tube and this water flushes your bowels out.
- ▲ **Operations.** There are several operations which may help control your bowel. Ask a continence adviser or your doctor if you want to know more.

If you feel you want to have better control of your continence, contact ASBAH, your local continence adviser or your doctor.

DAILY CHECK LIST TO IMPROVE YOUR BLADDER AND BOWEL ROUTINE

1. Always drink lots of fluids. Cranberry juice is good for you.
2. Try not to drink too much coffee, tea and Coke.
3. Make sure that your bladder empties properly.
4. Eat a good diet. If you don't know the right kinds of food, ask.
5. Do some exercise every day.

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