Bladder and Bowel Foundation

Factsheet: Faecal Incontinence

Faecal incontinence is more common than you would think. Unfortunately, it is a subject which is still not as openly talked about as it should be. Faecal incontinence affects over 53 million people in Europe making it more prevalent than many well known diseases such as asthma or diabetes.

Many people consider their bowel and its functions as a private area and most of us are embarrassed when something goes wrong with it.

Some people who suffer with faecal incontinence learn how to cope and do not let it interfere with their daily life. However others can become depressed and anxious about their condition or problem and feel that their problems are, in some way, their own fault.

People begin to feel alone and isolated if they cannot talk to anyone about their problems. Some people avoid any kind of social occasion or event and even avoid relationships and everyday activities. Some people never go out at all.

What is faecal incontinence?

If you are unable to control the passing of a liquid stool (diarrhoea) or a solid motion until an appropriate place is reached, then you have faecal incontinence. This may be a daily problem or happen from time to time. You may also experience involuntary loss of wind.

Causes of faecal incontinence

There are several causes of faecal incontinence and some are more common than others. The most common cause of faecal incontinence is damage to one or both of the anal sphincter muscles usually from childbirth, as well as constipation, disease or injury to the nerves, and surgery. Some disorders such as Alzheimers, Parkinsons disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Stroke and spinal cord injury can also sometimes cause faecal incontinence.

External anal sphincter muscle

The external anal sphincter is responsible for delaying bowel emptying once the rectum fills and the urge to empty the bowel is felt. The muscle may weaken or may even have a tear or disruption inside where it cannot be seen.

People with a weak or damaged external sphincter muscle typically experience urgency and if they can't reach a toilet in time, they become incontinent. This is because the weak or damaged muscle cannot squeeze hard enough to stop the stool from coming straight out.

Internal anal sphincter muscle

People with a damaged internal anal sphincter usually complain of ‘passive soiling’. Soft stool or small pellets of stool just leak out without the person realising it is happening. They have no control over these leaks. This can sometimes happen even after the bowels have been emptied and loss of stool can also occur with physical exertion.
Causes of weak sphincter muscle

Typical causes of weakness include:

- Childbirth
- Some types of surgery, for example haemorrhoids (piles).

Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea can be a cause of faecal incontinence.

Diarrhoea can be chronic, i.e. on-going and reoccurring, or acute, i.e. sudden and unexpected.

Common causes include:

- Infection is the most common cause in an acute episode. This condition is usually left to run its course. Increased fluid intake is advised to prevent dehydration. If the condition does not improve in a few days, you should seek medical advice.
- Side-effects of some medicines, such as antibiotics. Treatment is dependent upon the medicine responsible. Your doctor may recommend an alternative medication. Never stop taking a prescribed medicine without consulting your doctor.
- Some specific (but relatively uncommon) diseases of the colon e.g. ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease and diverticular disease.
- Reduced absorption of liquids from the bowel, which in some cases is the result of surgery.
- Radiotherapy.
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Constipation

This is probably the most common cause of faecal incontinence in the elderly and for disabled people. When you become constipated, especially when the faeces become extremely hard or "impacted", your body tries to soften the stool by adding liquid to it. This can result in a type of diarrhoea, known as "spurious diarrhoea", which is characteristically orange or light brown in colour.

Faecal incontinence of this type is characterised by prolonged periods of no bowel movement followed by a few days of incontinence. A number of factors can contribute to constipation. These include:

- A diet that is low in fibre. Your diet should be rich in fibre, including brown bread, fruit, vegetables and natural bran.
- Low fluid intake. You should maintain a good fluid intake of at least 1½ - 2 litres (three pints) each 24 hours.
- Poor mobility. Wherever possible, you should take gentle exercise, such as walking.
- Some medicines, for example continual use of pain killers such as codeine phosphate.

Other Causes

Incontinence can sometimes be the result of disease or injury to the nerves. Nerve injury and disease can cause a loss of sensation so that you do not know the bowel is full or that you need to empty your bowel. This may mean that sometimes you can't distinguish between the passage of solid (stool), gas (wind) or liquid (diarrhoea). It can also cause a loss of control over the muscles so that you cannot choose to delay opening the bowel in the usual way.
**Diagnosis**

With so many different possible causes, a detailed assessment is essential so that the right treatment can be commenced. Any assessment should include a medical examination to ensure that there is no serious or (rarely) underlying life-threatening condition.

If you have any of the following you must consult your doctor as soon as possible:

- Bleeding or pain;
- A feeling your bowel is never completely empty;
- Dark or black stools;
- Unexplained weight loss.

If you have weak sphincter muscles, you will require a proper assessment by a doctor, physiotherapist or continence nurse specialist. They will look at your anal sphincter muscles. The anal sphincter is part of the pelvic floor. Your health care professional will check for damage to the sphincter muscles (probably by carrying out an endoanal ultrasound) and they will test the strength of the anal sphincter and the general strength of your pelvic floor. Once they have determined the integrity of your muscles, they will start you on a programme of treatment. This may include specific sphincter exercises, pelvic floor exercises, electrical stimulation of the muscles, biofeedback or surgery.

**Further Information**

If you think you may have faecal incontinence it is most important to make an appointment to see your doctor straight away. It is useful to keep a bowel diary for a week or so before your appointment to record things such as how many times you go to the toilet, any accidents you have and what you eat or drink. This will be useful for the doctor as it may highlight an underlying cause of your symptoms.

You may also wish to seek advice from your local continence clinic. The continence clinics are run by the NHS and you don’t always need to be referred to a clinic by your GP, as some clinics will allow you to book an appointment yourself. To find your nearest continence clinic please call our office on 01926 357220.

**Products Available**

There are products available that can help you manage your symptoms. Products including pads and pants and pelvic floor toners may be useful to you, but it is recommended that you always seek advice from a health professional before you try any product as there may be other more appropriate options available to you.

If you are struggling with incontinence speak to your GP who can arrange for you to be assessed and issued with pads and pants. As an individual you can also choose to buy your products directly from a supplier.

Below we have listed some products for you. B&BC aims to provide up-to-date and accurate product information. No liability is accepted for any errors in the information presented. B&BF endorses neither the companies nor the products listed here.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bed Protection-Disposable</td>
<td>Abri-Soft is a disposable bed protector. Abri-Soft is designed to cover mattresses in order to absorb leakages, reduce odours and maintain dryness. The Abri-Soft is also ideal for use as additional protection for bed wetting and chair protection during procedures such as changing pads/nappies or making beds.</td>
<td>Available in 2 sizes and absorbencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed Protection-Washable</td>
<td>The Abri-Soft washable underpads are available with rounded corners, side tucks or handles. All bed pads are made with an absorbent polyester soaker to ensure high absorbency. With great attention to detail and with every care taken this product is of the highest standard in order to provide you with a comfortable product, without compromising on quality or durability.</td>
<td>Available in 3 styles, 2 sizes and absorbencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair Protection-Washable</td>
<td>Attractive discreet protection for chairs, wheelchairs and flooring. The quick drying surface helps to protect patient’s skin and the fluid proof layer protects your furniture.</td>
<td>Available in a variety of colours. Absorbency 235 ml</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaped Pad Special</td>
<td>Abri-San Special has specially designed barriers with built in pockets which offer full protection against leakage. The breathable Air-plus backing reduces the risk of skin soreness caused by repeated contact with faeces.</td>
<td>Absorbency 2000 ML Size 38 x 70 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abri-Let Anatomic</td>
<td>Recommended for light to moderate incontinence, to promote dignity and comfort we recommend close fitting underwear or fixation pants are worn. Abri-Let pads can also be used for faecal smearing</td>
<td>Available in one size and absorbency being 20 x 43 and 500ML</td>
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**Abena UK Ltd**

Address: Unit 2, Swallow Gate Business Park, Holbrook Lane, Holbrooks, Coventry, CV6 4BL

Tel: 024 7663 7663 Website: [www.abenaonline.co.uk/shop/frontpage.html](http://www.abenaonline.co.uk/shop/frontpage.html)

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<tr>
<td>Lil Fit Supreme</td>
<td>All in One Bodyworn Incontinence Pad. For heavy or continuous urinary incontinence or faecal incontinence, this incontinence pad is also ideal for the less mobile or bed based.</td>
<td>Come in 4 sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil Flex</td>
<td>Belted All in One Bodyworn Incontinence Pad- combines security of all in one product with easy fixing and re-fastening. For heavy or continuous urinary incontinence or faecal incontinence.</td>
<td>Come in 2 sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil Classic Fit</td>
<td>All in One Bodyworn Incontinence Pad. For heavy or continuous urinary incontinence or faecal incontinence, this incontinence pad is also ideal for the less mobile or bed based.</td>
<td>3 sizes available</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Allanda Ltd**

Address: Olney House, High Street, Olney. MK46 4EB Telephone: 0800 999 5565

Email: [info@allanda.co.uk](mailto:info@allanda.co.uk) Website: [www.allaboutincontinence.co.uk](http://www.allaboutincontinence.co.uk)
**Attends Ltd** 3rd Floor, The Old Post Office, St Nicholas Street Tel: 0845 6013272  
Fax: 0191 2427130 Email: attendslifestyles@attendshealthcare.com Website: www.attends.co.uk

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Pull-Ons</td>
<td>Attends Pull-Ons are a pull up pant designed for light to heavy urinary and/or faecal incontinence. Breathable back sheet, elasticated waist and a super absorbent core for improved skin dryness, leakage protection and odour protection.</td>
<td>Available in a range of sizes from X Small to X Large and 3 absorbency levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under Pads</td>
<td>Attends Cover-Dri are a range of disposable bed pads. Available in a range of sizes and absorbency levels. Contains super absorbent for improved skin dryness, leakage and odour protection</td>
<td>Available in 2 absorbency levels and 4 sizes</td>
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**Coloplast Ltd** Peterborough Business Park Peterborough Cambridgeshire PE2 6FX  
Tel: 0800 132787 Website: www.coloplast.co.uk

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<td>Peristeen Anal Plug</td>
<td>Provides an effective barrier to faeces and still allows for the passage of wind. Compact for easy of use, it expands gently inside the body. Made of soft, expandable foam. Can be worn for up to 12 hours.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peristeen Anal Irrigation</td>
<td>Product Code 29121: Peristeen Anal Irrigation is a way of emptying the lower part of the bowel by introducing warm tap water into the rectum using a catheter. Available on prescription. The System includes 1 control unit, 2 rectal catheters, 1 water bag, 1 set of straps, 1 toilet bag</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Peristeen Anal Irrigation Accessories | Product Code 29122: Accessory unit includes 15 rectal catheters, 1 water bag  
Product Code 29124: Includes 1 set of straps  
Product Code 29125: Includes 2 tubes with blue connectors |                                                                                                                                 |

**Incontinence UK** Address: 17c Weston Favell Centre Northampton Northamptonshire NN3 8JZ  
Tel: 0800 068 3625 Email: info@incontinenceuk.co.uk Website: www.incontinenceuk.co.uk/

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<td>Swimwear Undergarment Brief</td>
<td>This unique, discreet re-usable Incontinence Swimwear Undergarment Brief is for adults and teens dealing with incontinence. The adjustable brief is designed to be worn next to the skin under a swimming suit. It is mainly intended for bowel containment however it will protect a certain amount against urinary leakage. High tech stretch polyurethane fabric with soft fleece lining, elastic waist and legs for added security and a Velcro closure with fully adjustable sizing that opens up flat, for ease of dressing. Fully machine washable.</td>
<td>Available in sizes X Small - 5XL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull-Up Pants</td>
<td>Range of unisex disposable Pull-Up Pants from brands including: TENA Pants, Age UK Maxi Absorb, Lille Supreme and MoliCare. These discreet Pull Up Pants (Pull Up Adult Nappies) work just like normal underwear with a built in pad and are best suited for active people with moderate to heavy incontinence who are looking for more convenient and disposable incontinence products. They provide high security levels, include odour protection and are ultra absorbent. 100% breathable waterproof backing, elasticated waistband, anti leakage barrier, leg cuffs to prevent leakage and a wetness indicator to indicate when pull up pant should be changed.</td>
<td>Available in various sizes X Small - X Large and in absorbencies from 400 ml - 2900 ml</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All In One Briefs</td>
<td>Range of unisex disposable All-In-One Incontinence Briefs from brands including: TENA Slip, Age UK Maxi Absorb Feel Dry, Lille Supreme Fit, MoliCare and Softisof Shaped. These All in One Briefs (Adult Nappies) are designed for moderate to heavier incontinence conditions and/or users with lower levels of mobility or those who are bed based. Designed with a textile like fabric against the skin, with breathable waterproof panels, all working to keep skin as fresh as possible and fits completely around the body before being fastened securely with tapes. Elasticated waist for extra comfort, stay dry non-woven top layers, leg cuffs to prevent leakage and a wetness indicator to indicate when pad should be changed.</td>
<td>Available in various sizes X Small - XX Large and in absorbencies from 1300 ml - 4100 ml</td>
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## TENA Flex Belted Product

The TENA Flex Incontinence Pad is a revolutionary unisex range for heavy incontinence conditions. Unique 100% Breathable belted product that is easier and quicker to change than traditional products. It offers the security and flexibility of an all-in-one system combined with comfort and discretion and the added benefit of enabling normal toilet use without full product removal. Incorporates SuperFit waist belt and ComfiStretch elastic s which gently stretch to follow the body movements improving comfort for users, as well as odour neutraliser control and wetness indicator.

Available in various sizes Small - X Large and in absorbencies from 1700 ml - 4900 ml

## Large Shaped Insert Pads

Range of unisex Large Shaped Insert Pads from brands including: TENA Comfort, Lille Supreme Form, MoliForm Soft, Softisof Shaped and Age UK Maxi Absorb Large Pads. These disposable large shaped pads are to be used with Stretch/Fixation Pants - specially designed to hold larger pads securely in place and hug the body more neatly and discreetly than day to day underwear. For moderate to severe incontinence and available in both daytime and night-time absorbency.

Available in various absorbencies from 500 ml to 3300 ml

## Large Shaped Insert Pads for Men

MoliForm Soft for Men large shaped disposable pads are specifically designed for men as it is larger at the front. For moderate to heavy urine incontinence and faecal incontinence. Wear with stretch fixation pants. Advanced Dry technology to provide 30% more dryness providing extra protection for the patient's skin avoiding swelling and irritation. Soft breathable waterproof backing and wetness indicator.

Absorbency 1000 ml

## Stretch/Fixation Pants

Range of unisex Stretch/Fixation Pants from brands including: Age UK, TENA Fix and MoliPants. Stretch Pants are specifically designed, figure hugging pants to hold large shaped disposable pads securely in place. Making sure you get the right fit reduces the risk of incontinence leaks, will be more comfortable and will feel more secure.

Available in sizes Small - XX Large and in pack of 5 or 25

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**Paul Hartmann**  
Heywood Distribution Park, Pilsworth Road, Heywood, Lancs OL10 2TT  
Tel: 0800 028 94 90  
Email: customer.service@uk.hartmann.info  
Website: www.hartmanndirect.co.uk

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<tr>
<td>Shaped Pads</td>
<td>MoliCare Mobile Super are discrete pull-up pants with soft breathable textile backing, which can be worn like normal underwear. They can be easily pulled on and off enabling you to continue with an active life. Suitable for severe urinary and faecal incontinence</td>
<td>3 sizes available s,m,l</td>
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The Bladder and Bowel Community provides information and support for people with bladder and bowel issues. We publish a wide range of user friendly booklets and factsheets.

For more information please call us on 01926 357220, email help@bladderandbowelfoundation.org or write to us at The Bladder and Bowel Community, 7 The Court, Holywell Business Park, Northfield Road, Southam, CV47 0FS.

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Registered office address: Pegasus House, Solihull Business Park, Solihull, West Midlands, United Kingdom, B90 4GT. Company number: 10377236. Registered in the UK

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