

Continence products are absorbent pads or underwear designed to contain urine and/or faeces in people who are not able to get to the toilet either some or all of the time. There are many different sizes, shapes and makes of product available. Some are disposable (designed to be used once then thrown away), others are washable (designed to be cleaned, dried and reused).

This information is about disposable products. Products to contain incontinence are usually called continence containment products, pads, or products. Here they will just be referred to as products.

Where can I buy products?

Products are available to buy from most supermarkets, chemist shops and disability shops as well as online. They are also available from the Bladder & Bowel UK shop, through the website. Some online suppliers will provide a limited number of free samples.

Are products available free of charge?

Products may be available from the NHS (depending on local policies) for people who:

- Have had a specialist assessment of their bladder and bowel health
- (Where appropriate) have undergone a treatment programme, supported by a healthcare professional with specialist – knowledge
- Have been assessed as unable to become continent with an appropriate treatment programme

Products are not available for treatable conditions. Many bladder and bowel issues are treatable. Therefore, adults experiencing difficulties with their bladder or bowel should speak to their GP or other healthcare professional.

How do I find out if products may be provided by the NHS?

If you think you, or an adult you care for, may be entitled to have products provided for them, speak to the GP or other healthcare professional. They will know who should do the assessment for bladder and bowel health in your area and will make a referral if appropriate. Some local bladder and bowel services will accept self-referrals.

What type of product will be provided?

If appropriate you/the person you care for should be offered a product that meets their assessed needs. In some cases, this may be a different product for overnight to the one suggested for during the day.

The product offered may be a one-piece or a two-piece product. The one-piece product (often referred to as a slip product) has an absorbent area in the groin with tabs to hold it in place around the waist. The two-piece product consists of an absorbent pad, with a pair of pants (known as fixation pants) to keep it in place. These are as effective as the one-piece product, but are often more discrete.

All the products come in different sizes and absorbencies. It is important that the product fits and is used correctly, or it may be more likely to leak.

What will happen if products are provided?

This will vary slightly according to where you live and local policy. What is provided will depend on what the assessment has shown. However, once the decision is made by the healthcare professional that products are needed, samples should be provided. The samples will be of a product or products that are available locally and that should meet the need for containment of the incontinence.

Once the samples have been tried, you will need to contact the healthcare professional to let them know whether the product worked well. If it did, the healthcare professional will order a supply of products and let you know how and when to get more.

The healthcare professional should show you how to store the product, how to put it on and when to change it. There is also information on how to use products in the Bladder & Bowel UK leaflet 'How to get the best out of your continence products'. Most manufacturers also provide product fitting guides online.

You will be told how many products per day are going to be supplied. The maximum number per day is usually four. Products are usually delivered to home and you will be sent several weeks supply at once.

A reassessment of bladder and bowel health and product needs will normally be done at least once a year, although this will vary slightly depending on local policy.

I keep running out of products – can I get more?

Sufficient products should be supplied to meet assessed needs. Products do not need to be changed as soon as the person using them has passed urine, as the super absorbency in the product will keep the top layer dry. They but should be left on until they are full or nearly full (for more information on when to change the product see the Bladder & Bowel UK leaflet on [Getting the Best Out of Your Products](#)). If the product is changed too soon you are more likely to run out.

If you are running out of products regularly, speak to your healthcare professional. They may be able to reassess your needs or provide a product that needs changing less often.

If you need to purchase extra products, your healthcare professional will be able to tell you where to get these. Products are available to purchase online from most of the companies that supply the NHS, & they may offer you a discounted rate. They are also available from disability shops including the [Bladder & Bowel UK shop](#), through our website. Supermarkets and chemist shops also sell some products.

My needs have changed and the product no longer works well

If your needs change and the product start to leak regularly, or you are getting sore skin, then contact your healthcare professional. You should try to do this about six to eight weeks before the next delivery is due. This allows time for an assessment to be done, samples of a different product to be tried and a decision made about which product will be best now.

In most areas, once a delivery has been made the product cannot be changed before the next delivery.

What should I do with products provided for me that are not needed?

Products are provided by the NHS on a named person basis. They should be used for that person only and not be given or sold to anyone else. Most areas will arrange a collection of any unused products that are no longer needed. Contact your healthcare professional to find out what the local arrangements are.

Storage & fitting of products:

Storage: store in a dry place such as a chest of drawers or wardrobe.

Do not store pads in a bathroom or cellar as the dampness will affect the overall absorbency of the product leading to potential leakage, loss of dignity and skin related problems.

Pads can be removed from the packaging into a drawer, for example, up to 24 hours prior to use to aid activation of the fibres responsible for absorbing urine. Most pads are vacuum packed, so it is good to let them breathe prior to application to aid comfort.

Fitting: the pads should be fitted as per manufacturer's instructions; here are further hints and tips to aid fitting:

- If the pad has an adhesive strip these should be worn in close fitting underwear, eg Sloggi pants, with the strip removed and the pad attached to the gusset area of the pants
- If the pad does not have an adhesive strip these should be worn with close fitting underwear, as described above, or with fixation pants that can be sourced from all pad companies.

Underwear is important if pads are worn as a two-piece system. If the pad is not held in place effectively there will be leakage and the pad will not hold the amount of urine it should.

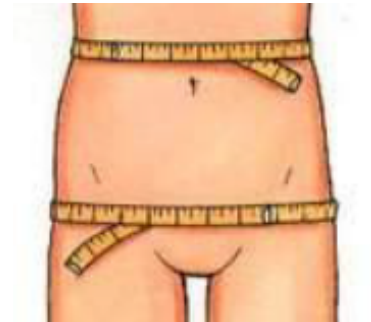
For all-in-one products that fasten with side tabs these must be selected based upon hip and waist measurements as they should fit like a pair of pants. These are suitable if a two-piece system has failed. For example, if an individual removes pads.

If the product fits at the waist but appears to leak from the leg area due to thin legs, for example, then fixation pants can be worn over the product to aid a better fit closer to the body to reduce leakage.

If more absorbency is needed, it is worth considering looking for an alternative style of pad as going up a size to gain absorbency does not work. Leakage and poor fitting will occur.

Most pads, except for bedsheets, are body worn and therefore should be worn with close fitting underwear. Pads should not be placed under an

Pads should not be placed under an individual a bed or chair as this will result in leakage and will not provide effective protection.



Before fitting any pad fold it lengthways as this aids close fitting to the body promoting better absorption of urine and containment of faeces whilst activating anti leak cuffs, if present.

Wetness indicator: if present this will be visible on the outside of the pad, should be used as a guide to assist with changing a pad when it is near to its absorbency capacity. Refer to the individual manufacturer guidelines to assist with this.



Bowel Incontinence: if a pad is soiled or contains faecal matter the pad should be removed as soon as possible and skin hygiene attended to immediately.

Creams: should be avoided when pads are worn as much as possible.

Only prescribed creams should be used in the affected area and applied in a very thin layer. Water based creams should be used not oil based as these can greatly interfere with the absorbency of the pads by clogging the pores that assist absorption of urine. Do not use talc as this clogs the pad.

If all of the above good practice has been followed and the pad is leaking or you observe a skin related issue please consult with your local Continence Service to request an assessment of needs.

Further information

Find more information about bladder and bowel health in our [Adult's information library](#). You can also contact the [Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline](#) (0161 214 4591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.

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