Clothing for continence and incontinence

DLF Factsheet

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INTRODUCTION

Carefully chosen clothing, together with equipment for independence and establishing a routine, can often make the difference between continence and incontinence, dependence and independence.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Keep fastenings to a minimum, e.g. elastic waisted trousers or skirts.
- Keep garments to a minimum, e.g. replace petticoats with lined garments.
- Looser garments can be easier to put on/pull down than tight garments.
- Choose clothes that enable you to undress quickly, e.g. drop-front/back trousers, underpants can be attached to trousers, and zips replaced with Velcro.
- Choose clothing that is washable.
- If a garment gets wet or soiled, it should be washed as soon as is practicable or at least soaked in cold water to minimise staining and odour.
- Choose clothes which disguise drainage bags, and allow access for emptying.

CHOICE OF CLOTHES

UNDERWEAR

WOMEN'S UNDERWEAR

Knickers

- Bikini briefs, thongs and tanga pants may be easier to manage than traditional knickers as they are easier to push or pull down.
- French knickers at least 40cm wide can be used if an individual is having difficulty getting knickers up or down. The crotch can be pulled to one side to use the toilet or female urinal.
- If catheterised, any style can be worn, provided that the leg elastic does not constrict the catheter tube causing back pressure.
- Open-crotch and drop-front knickers can eliminate the need to pull pants up and down, and are useful if using a hoist to transfer onto the toilet or when using a male or female hand-held urinal.
- Crotchless knickers may be brought from adult shops/mail order catalogues
- Caminickers, bodies and teddies are two-in-one garments, replacing vests and knickers. They fasten at the crotch with small press studs.
Adaptations

- Ordinary knickers can be adapted to have a crotch opening by undoing the front of crotch seam and extending the crotch flap to an accessible place at the front of the pants. This adaptation is also useful if tummy control pants are worn as their high elastane fibre content and fiddly fasteners make them difficult to remove in a hurry.

- Removal of the crotch gusset from a traditional pair of bloomers and binding the opening enables them to become open crotch. If necessary, the opening can be extended by opening up the centre of the back seam.

Petticoats

- Waist slips are more easily changed in case of accidents.

Stockings/tights

- Hold-up stockings or stockings attached to a girdle or suspender belt are preferable to tights as they do not need to be removed; however, they are not recommended for anyone with circulation problems.

- If tights are preferred, two pairs of one-legged or open crotch tights may be the easiest options, particularly for individuals with catheters or those who need to self catheterise.

- Open gusset tights are widely available and when worn under the pants can be left in position when using the toilet or hand-held urinal.

MEN'S UNDERWEAR

Underpants

- Boxer shorts tend to have short fly openings; lengthening the fly will make access easier.

- Underpants with a horizontal opening may be helpful to some people; most high street clothing retailers stock men’s underwear with openings on either side, horizontal or vertical.

- If catheterised, any style of underpants can be worn, provided that the leg elastic does not constrict the catheter tube causing back pressure, e.g. boxer shorts.

- Drop-front pants are now made for men.

- ‘Comfi shorts’ are pants available for men and women; they are designed to fit snugly and to hold drainage bags securely against the thigh in a convenient position for emptying.

Vests
• Long length vests are difficult to remove quickly and would need to be changed when wet and may get in the way during transfers on and off the toilet.

TROUSERS

• Trousers with a completely or half elasticated waistband may be the easiest to manage because they can be pushed down.

• Styles with front pleats, rather than those which are straight across the front, are easier to remove at speed.

• Trousers with a longer fly fastening are available from traditional suppliers and enable men to lower their trousers more easily giving clearer access when using a hand held urinal.

• Men may find braces easier to manage. Edgware braces may be particularly helpful - these enable trousers to be lowered without removing garments worn over the braces or undoing the braces. Contact a clothing advice service for details.

• Trouser styles which have looser fitting legs will enable drainage bags to be well concealed.

• Leisure trousers with a zip at the knee give better access when emptying catheter bags.

Adaptations to trousers

• A 25cm zip inserted head down in the thigh or leg seam gives easy access for emptying drainage bags. A pocket can be sewn into the inside of the trouser leg to hold a bag.

• Changing a standard hook and bar to a larger size, or replacing it with a large button or trouser weight press stud, makes fastening easier.

• Replacing the hook and bar with Velcro is another alternative but, to hold securely, the Velcro must be doubled back through a ‘d’ ring.

• If someone finds zips difficult to manage, zipper pull attachments or replacing the zip with Velcro may be a solution; plain Velcro does tend to come undone on trouser fastenings.

• Cargo trousers and shorts with a pocket at knee or thigh level can be adapted by opening the seam inside the pocket, to carry the catheter bag.

• Drop back/front trousers are another adaptation which involves inserting a 30cm long zip into each side seam, so that the front or back can be dropped. An elastic waistband keeps up the side which is not dropped.

• Underpants can be altered by opening the side seams and attaching front and back waistbands to the trousers with Velcro. The two garments can then be
taken off together. Always ensure the hooked scratchy surface Velcro faces away from the body.

- Extending the fly opening as far as the crotch seam prevents spillage when using a hand held urinal.

- For women who self-catheterise, continuous openings can be inserted into the inside of the leg seam from knee to knee, through the crotch, and fastened with a simple zip or Velcro strip. This will give easy access if worn with crotchless or drop-front pants.

- For men who self-catheterise, elasticated trousers or styles with pleats at the waist or with a long fly fastening may be easier to manage.

**NIGHTWEAR**

- For women, knee length nightdresses and nightshirts are the easiest to cope with.

- Choose pyjamas with short jackets and trousers with elasticated waists.

- For men, knee length nightshirts can be a useful substitute for pyjamas and may be easier to manage when using the toilet.

**DRESSING TECHNIQUES**

- Removing underpants while still sitting is easier if they fit loosely. A seated individual can push down underpants each side alternately whilst rocking from buttock to buttock.

- People who can support themselves with one hand on a very secure toilet rail may be able to lift their buttocks at the same time as adjusting their underpants with the free hand. If shoulder movement is limited, pulling up pants and trousers with arms crossed over the front of the body reduces the shoulder movement required.

- Someone with poor grip may find that loops positioned so that he/she can insert a thumb into them are helpful. This technique can be used for both pants/knickers and trousers.

**DRESSES AND SKIRTS**

- A-line dresses and skirts are the easiest to lift out of the way quickly. Straight, fitted or very full skirts are more difficult to move.

- A wrap-over skirt can be unfastened quickly for quick access.

- Wheelchair users may find wrap-over or completely button-through styles, Which can be left behind on the chair, convenient.
EQUIPMENT TO ASSIST WITH DRESSING

- A dressing stick with a cleft at one end can be useful to help push trousers or underpants down. The hook at the other end can be used to pull them up if loops have been sewn into the tops.

- A ‘pant clip’ is a pair of sturdy clips joined together by a length of elastic. One clip is fastened to the waistband and the other to the upper garments so that when trousers and pants are lowered they do not fall out of reach during transfer onto the toilet.

- Hand-held urinals for men and women have been improved in recent years and now offer an acceptable alternative to transferring on and off the toilet so frequently during the day and night.

INCONTINENCE PANTS AND PADS

Many styles of pants and pads are available. However, the style of pant is often specific to the type of pad chosen. Incorrect mixing of pads and pants of different types may well result in leakage. Pants should always be close fitting. Pants with built-in pads may seem more acceptable for men and women with occasional continence needs, but when wet the whole garment will need to be removed and washed. For more details on continence pads and products contact the Continence Foundation, Promocon or your local continence adviser (find out the name and number of your continence adviser from your GP or local Independent Living Centre).

Trousers from traditional suppliers with a high waist and a fly fastening that is 2in longer than standard will accommodate pads more comfortably than hipster or low waist trousers.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Continence Foundation
307 Hatton Square
16 Baldwin Gardens
London EC1N 7RJ
Tel: (020) 7404 6875
Fax: (020) 7404 6876
Minicom: (020) 7831 9831
Helpline: 0845 345 0165 (9am–1pm, M-F)
Website: www.continence-foundation.org.uk

Answers calls from the public and professionals about bowel and bladder problems.

Incontact
United House
North Road
London N7 9PD
Tel: 0870 770 3246
Fax: 0870 770 3249
Email: info@incontact.org
Website: www.incontact.org

Provides information and support for people affected by bladder and bowel problems.
Clothing Advice and Information Service
The Independent Living Centre
Marsh Green Road
North Marsh
Barton
Exeter EX2 8LT
Tel: (01392) 687 276
Website: www.devon.gov.uk/ilc
Contact: Philippa Greenslade

Clothing Service
White Cottages Lodge
Wrexham
North Wales LL11 5NR
Tel: (01978) 752 534

Posture Independence and Mobility Service
Oxford Centre For Enablement
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre
Windmill Road, Headington
Oxford OX3 7LD
Tel: (01865) 227 600
Contact: by referral from any local health care professional

PromoCon
Redbank House
4 St Chad’s Street
Cheetham
Manchester
M8 8QA
Tel: 0870 760 1580
Fax: 0161 214 5961
Helpline: 0161 834 2001
Website: www.promocon2001.co.uk
Contact:

Dressability
Pinehurst Peoples Centre
Beech Avenue
Swindon
Wilts SN2 1JT
Tel:(01793) 485 3774
Email: info@dressability.org

Suit Yourself
Avon Disabled Living Centre
The Vassal Centre
Gill Avenue
Fishponds
Bristol BS16 2QQ
Tel: (0117) 965 3651
Email; info@dlcbristol.org
Website www.dlcbristol.org.uk

We would like to thank the Clothing Advice Service at the Independent Living Centre in Exeter for assistance in updating these factsheets.
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380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU

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