

Disposable continence products for adults



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. In this leaflet they will 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 available from the Bladder & Bowel UK shop at our 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 AND
- Where appropriate, have undergone a treatment programme, supported by a healthcare professional with specialist knowledge OR
- 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.

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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. For more information refer to the Bladder & Bowel website.

What type of product will be 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.

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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. 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 are also available from disability shops including the Bladder & Bowel UK shop at 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.

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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

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.

Further information

Find more information about adult bladder and bowel health in our information library at www.bbuk.org.uk. You can also contact the [Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline](tel:01612144591) (0161 214 4591).

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