

## Let's Get Practical: Real Advice for Real Situations

Offering women with UI practical advice on how to talk about their condition with others can help to alleviate anxiety.

**Talk about it:** Let her know that although bringing up bladder issues can feel awkward, having honest conversations is the best approach.

**Information is key:** Suggest that she keeps a bladder diary, as this can make it easier for her to talk with her doctor about bladder symptoms. It helps to keep track of fluids, leaks or accidents, activities, as well as how often and when she uses the toilet.

**Conservative measures:** Often women are reluctant to seek treatment as they think the only options available are surgery or medication. They don't realise there are things they can do for themselves that can be beneficial, for example finding out where the next toilet is situated if taking part in planned activities.

**You are not alone:** Remind her that she is not alone - an estimated 1 in 3 women experience UI over the age of 18.<sup>5</sup>

The ICS is a registered charity with a global health focus which strives to improve the quality of life for people affected by incontinence by advancing basic and clinical science through education, research and advocacy.

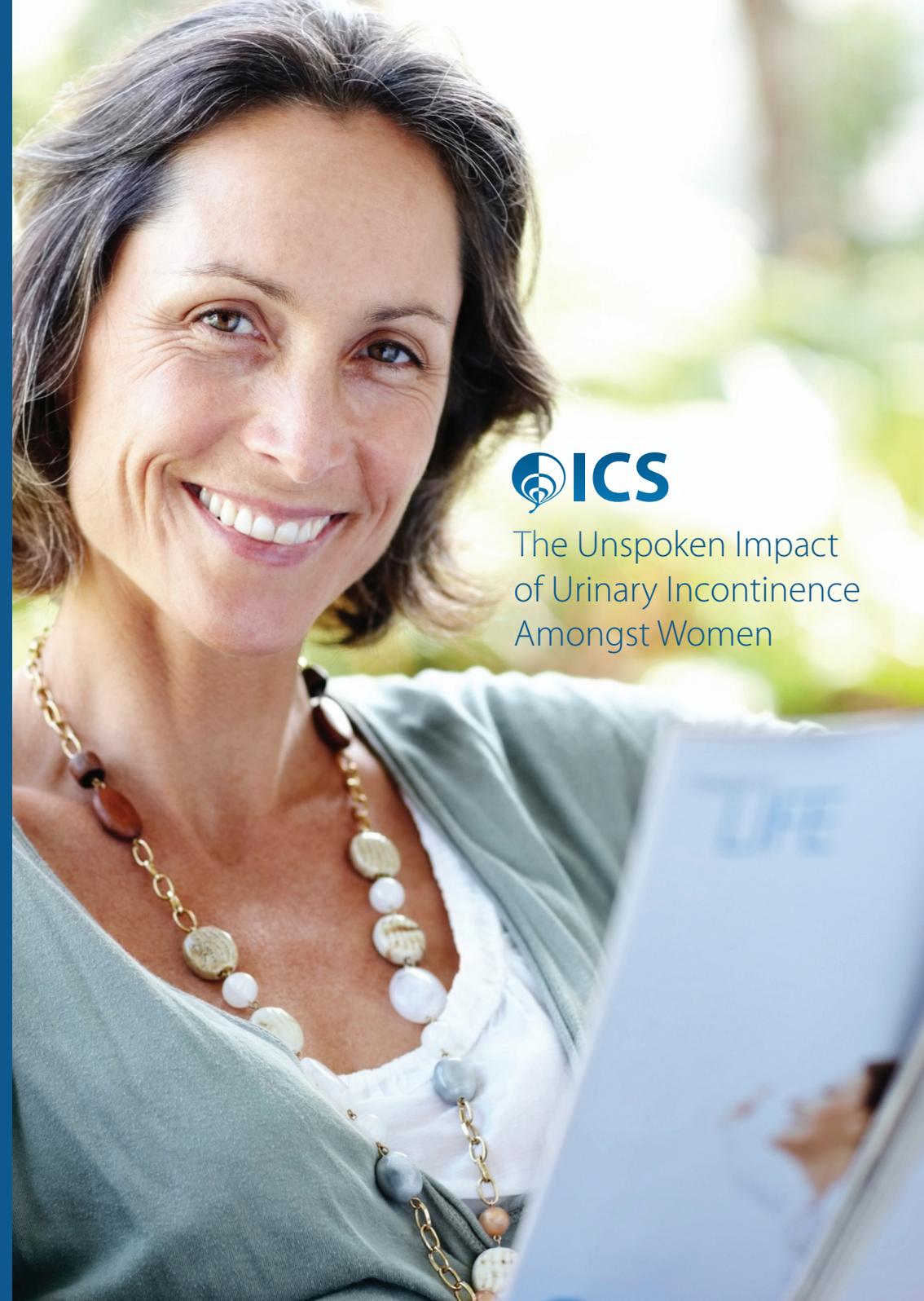
This leaflet was developed independently by the ICS and was funded by an unrestricted grant from Procter & Gamble (P&G) makers of Always Discreet®, a new product line developed to support women experiencing urinary incontinence (UI) to help them manage the condition.

The ICS Membership Homepage is the hub for our members to interact with the society. As well as a subscription to our official journal, members can register themselves in the ICS Research Network, manage their abstract submissions and workshop applications, get involved in our Faculty and Committees, keep up to date in continence research and news, access ICS publications, documents and e-learning, contribute to forums and draft standardisation reports and get substantial discounts to ICS Annual Meetings and Education Courses.

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### About the Always Discreet® Survey

Always, has a rich heritage of supporting women through their life stages and has now developed Always Discreet®, a range of incontinence liners, pads and underpants designed for light to heavy degrees of bladder sensitivity. Always worked with an independent Steering Committee of leading incontinence experts and a health psychologist to develop a validated in-depth questionnaire of women with urinary incontinence across France, Germany, the US and UK. The survey of 1200 women (aged 45-60) delved into the lives of women with the aim of uncovering the burden of urinary incontinence (UI) on women's quality-of-life, their body- and self-image and behaviour.



The Unspoken Impact  
of Urinary Incontinence  
Amongst Women

<sup>5</sup>. Abrams P, Cardozo L, Fall M et al. 2002. The standardisation of terminology of lower urinary tract function: report from the standardisation sub-committee of the International Continence Society. *Neurourol Urodyn*. 21: 167-168; Systematic review and evaluation of methods of assessing urinary incontinence. Martin et al., *Health Technology Assessment*, 10(6):1-132, 2006

## Understanding UI

Urinary incontinence (UI) is more common than we realise – especially amongst women. Studies suggest that one in three women over the age of 18 in Western Europe have experienced some degree of UI<sup>1</sup>, although the exact figures are difficult to determine.

The reason is simple: UI is a condition that women don't feel comfortable telling their closest friends, family or healthcare professional about.

UI affects women of all ages and has a recognised impact on health-related quality-of-life (QoL), yet there is limited existing evidence on how widespread the impact of UI is on women worldwide.

Beyond inconvenience, UI produces a sense of loss of control and can result in compensatory behaviour change, negative impact on quality of life, a sense of shame, isolation and even depression.

The association of depression especially with urge urinary incontinence – possibly because of its unpredictability and higher volume of loss – may be as high as 44%.<sup>2</sup>

The high impact of UI on women's QoL is felt in many different ways: up to 80%<sup>3</sup> of women use one or more adaptive behaviours (e.g. limited physical activity and restricted social interaction).

### Continence and the Pelvic Floor

As you may be aware, there are several causes of a weakened pelvic floor, some are surprising and others reflect the modern lifestyle.

- ✓ Pregnancy and childbirth
- ✓ Pre-menstrual hormone levels
- ✓ Strenuous sports (e.g. running and even trampoline jumping)
- ✓ Obesity

### Effects of UI on Daily Life

Whether travelling, in the office or going to a special event, the study by authors at the Bristol Urology Institute (BUI) and supported by Always Discreet<sup>4</sup> showed that life with UI can create a lot of anxiety, particularly when leaks catch someone off guard.

In fact, 15% of women with UI believe that it affects their work or daily activities moderately or a lot, while over a third of women say their UI affects their ability to travel.<sup>4</sup>

## UI and Mental Health

Besides physiological aspects of UI, many women suffer psychologically. According to a recent study conducted by authors at the Bristol Urology Institute (BUI) in England and supported by Always Discreet<sup>4</sup>, 11% of women are moderately or very much depressed by their UI. Half (48%) of women with urinary incontinence regularly feel bad about themselves because of their condition.

More than a quarter of the women surveyed admitted to the fact that the condition is affecting intimacy with their partners and more than a third went on to say that bladder sensitivity causes relationship problems with their other halves.

16% of women are embarrassed by their UI often or all the time and they dread the idea that their condition may be exposed. Many women experience a constant worry that they may have an unidentified leak on clothes and that someone may notice. Or even worse, they worry about odour, with seven in 10 women with UI actively fear that they smell.

Women do many things to hide the fact that they have UI. Whilst they do not stop living their lives, the condition has a major impact on their quality of life, their wellbeing, self-perception and self-image, sexual behaviour, levels of anxiety and mood. Constant and regular feelings of insecurity, helplessness, isolation and anger may add to the affected woman's anxiety and can lead to depression.



1. Milsom I, Altman D, Lapitan MC, Nelson R, Sillen U, Thom D. Epidemiology of urinary (UI) and faecal (FI) incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse (POP). In: 4th International Consultation on Incontinence. Recommendations of the International Scientific Committee: evaluation and treatment of urinary incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse, and fecal incontinence, ed. P Abrams, L Cardozo, S Khoury, A Wein. Paris: Health Publication Ltd (2009).  
2. Stach-Lempinen B, Hakala A, Laippala P et al. 2003. Severe depression determines quality of life in urinary incontinent women. *Neurourol Urodyn.* 22:563–568  
3. Habits & Practices Research (2007) Female Adult Incontinence: UK, France & Germany.  
4. The Impact of Urinary Incontinence on Quality of Life: Results from a survey in France, Germany, the UK and the USA\* published in BJUI online 24 June 2014. This data was calculated using a Quality of Life validation tool, for a full representation of the validated data please refer to the BJUI article <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/bju.12852/abstract>.