An evaluation of disposable pads for women with light incontinence

There is a wide range of pads available for women with light incontinence. However, there is little information on how well these products perform. Health professionals and purchasers experience a similar problem, with a dearth of impartial information to help inform and guide product purchase. The aim of this study was to evaluate the current range of disposable pads that are available for light incontinence.

Subjects
Sixty women between the ages of 50 and 91 with a diagnosis of stress, urge or mixed incontinence took part in the evaluation; they were recruited by continence nurse specialists in the UK. Twelve products that were available on the UK market in September 2000 were included in the full evaluation. Also, ten pads with greater absorbency, produced by the same manufacturers, were included in a complementary evaluation. The less absorbent products have been termed Group A and the more absorbent products, Group B.

Study design
The study had a randomised multiple crossover design, with each subject testing all products. We were aware that because of the nature of their incontinence, different women will leak in different ways, for example by gushing or dribbling. A multiple crossover approach ensures that the products are treated equally since each subject evaluates all products.

Methods
Each subject was asked to test one of the less absorbent Group A products for five days, followed by the more absorbent Group B product for two days. (Two manufacturers did not have a Group B product, so during these weeks, the subjects tested Group A pads for seven days). The products were evaluated using three tools:

- Product performance questionnaire (Group A pads). This comprised 17 questions related to product performance. Subjects rated performance on a three-point scale (good, okay or poor);
- Product performance questionnaire (Group B pads). This was a short complementary questionnaire with five questions. Again, using a three-point scale, subjects were asked to rate how the product performed compared with its less absorbent counterpart (better, worse or same);
- A pad weight and leakage diary (Group A pads only). This enabled the collection of data regarding how much urine each product contained and if it leaked. Subjects were asked to rate leakage on a three-point scale (none, a little or a lot).

Results and discussion
Before the study began, a separate group of users were consulted on the pad features that they considered important. Leakage, fit and smell were rated as the three most important features by the 43 female respondents. Leakage has been chosen for discussion in this article. Also, overall opinion of the product is discussed as it sums up product performance.

Group A (Less absorbent products)
Statistically significant differences were found in 13 of the 17 areas on the product performance questionnaire (Table 1). Full results have been published in a report by the Medical Devices Agency (2002).

Leakage (Fig 1)
The pad weight and leakage diary results indicated that the mode of the urine weight (the most frequent weight of urine recorded in the pads) was 8g. Data show that with 10g of urine in the pad, between 81 per cent to 95 per cent of all disposable pads did not leak ‘at all’.

The best performing pad at 10g of urine (selected for closeness to the mean urine weight) was the ‘Tena Lady Extra’ pad, as 95 per cent did not leak at all with 10g of urine. However, the best performing pad at 20g and 40g of urine was the ‘Indasec Midi’.

All of the products generally performed well in terms of their ability to prevent leakage of urine.

The product performance questionnaire data represents the subjects’ opinion of leakage performance. The results indicated similar results to the pad weight and leakage diaries, and two products in particular performed well: ‘Anamini Extra’ and ‘Indasec Midi’. The least successful product was the ‘Attends 3’.

Overall opinion (Fig 2)
Subjects were asked to give a rating of ‘good’ if they thought the product was good and would continue to use it. In general, pads rated highly for overall opinion were also rated highly for other aspects of product performance.

Two products performed especially well for overall opinion: the ‘Prevail Extra Plus’ and ‘Tena Lady Extra’. Two products were considered ‘poor’ in terms of overall opinion: the ‘Attends 3’ and the ‘Molimed Classic Midi’.

Group B (More absorbent pads)
Less than 50 per cent of subjects rated the leakage performance of the more absorbent pads as ‘better’ than the less absorbent pads, and only about a third of the subjects found the more absorbent products to be better overall. In general, the more absorbent pads were...
# TABLE 1. STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN PRODUCT PERFORMANCE OF PADS

![Table of statistically significant differences in product performance of pads](image)

**Key:**

- `=` the proportion of subjects who found this product to be good (as opposed to okay/poor) was significantly higher than for one other product.
- `=` the proportion of subjects who found this product to be good (as opposed to okay/poor) was significantly higher than for two other products.
- `=` the proportion of subjects who found this product to be poor (as opposed to good/okay) was significantly higher than for one other product.
- `=` the proportion of subjects who found this product to be poor (as opposed to good/okay) was significantly higher than for two other products.

A shaded blank cell indicates that there were no significant differences between products.

In comparing any two products on a given question, the criterion used for suggesting statistical significance is $p<0.001$.

### REFERENCES

Medical Devices Agency (2002)

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IN9. London: HMSO.

The full version of this evaluation will be published in Ostomy and Continence Nursing later this year.
focus on the products that scored well on performance and users should look at the full evaluation results and reasonably priced (MDA, 2002). Purchasers, prescribers perform well on key performance aspects and are also ‘Tena Lady Extra’ and the ‘Prevail Extra Plus’. aspects, had relatively good leakage results. Even the least-favoured pad, the ‘Attends 3’, which was rated ‘poor’ for the largest number of performance as vaginal hysterectomy. surgery for stress incontinence should know all of the pros and cons of the options available, such as:
• The relatively non-invasive nature of the procedure with the option of local or regional anaesthetic;
• Little is known about TVT’s effectiveness in the long term, or if problems are likely after the first few years;
• Whether the woman may become pregnant. Surgery for stress incontinence, including TVT, is not generally suitable for women who go on to have children;
• Whether surgery for stress incontinence will be carried out at the same time as other surgery, such as vaginal hysterectomy.

For more information, see: www.nice.org.uk

Seven in ten adults have bladder problems. A survey has revealed that bladder problems may affect more than 70 per cent of the adult population, a figure far higher than previously thought. Problems reported by 71 per cent of the 506 men and women surveyed included: urinary tract infections; cystitis; leaking urine when coughing or laughing; rushing to get to the toilet in time; and going to the toilet too often. Incontact, a charity that helps people with bladder and bowel problems, commissioned the survey to mark the launch of its Healthy Bladder Campaign which aims to raise awareness of bladder problems in the UK. The charity challenges previous estimates that about six million people in the UK have bladder problems at some time in their lives, a prevalence of just 10 per cent. The most common problem reported (by 42 per cent considered less discreet than the less absorbent pads, which is not surprising as they look bigger and bulkier.

The results suggest that provision of more absorbent (and more expensive) products would not benefit most women. However, there remains a need for this type of product, as women with a larger body build tended to prefer larger products, probably to achieve a better fit.

Conclusion
All products performed well in terms of holding urine without leakage. This is encouraging as users see leakage as one of the most important aspects of pad performance. Even the least-favoured pad, the ‘Attends 3’, which was rated ‘poor’ for the largest number of performance aspects, had relatively good leakage results.

Two products scored very highly on most aspects of performance and were successful ‘all-rounders’: the ‘Tena Lady Extra’ and the ‘Prevail Extra Plus’. The results suggest it is possible to buy pads that perform well on key performance aspects and are also reasonably priced (MDA, 2002). Purchasers, prescribers and users should look at the full evaluation results and focus on the products that scored well on performance aspects that are important to them, and consider cost.

NICE recommends tension-free vaginal tape The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has recommended tension-free vaginal tape (TVT) for the surgical treatment for women with stress incontinence when non-surgical treatments, such as pelvic floor exercises, have not worked. The NICE appraisal committee found evidence of TVT’s effectiveness. It was also cost effective compared with the main alternative procedures. Stress incontinence can be caused by weakness of the pelvic floor and TVT is used to support the urethra, allowing it to remain closed and stop urine leakage when there is a sudden increase in abdominal pressure, for example when coughing. The tape provides support only when needed.

A short operation, under local or general anaesthetic, is needed to fit the TVT. The surgeon inserts the tape through the vaginal wall and passes it either side of the urethra. The ends of the tape are then pulled through two cuts on the skin’s surface just above the pubic area.

NICE recommends that women considering surgery for stress incontinence should know all of the pros and cons of the options available, such as:
• The relatively non-invasive nature of the procedure with the option of local or regional anaesthetic;
• Little is known about TVT’s effectiveness in the long term, or if problems are likely after the first few years;
• Whether the woman may become pregnant. Surgery for stress incontinence, including TVT, is not generally suitable for women who go on to have children;
• Whether surgery for stress incontinence will be carried out at the same time as other surgery, such as vaginal hysterectomy.
of respondents) was rushing to get to the toilet in time, a common symptom of an overactive bladder. More than a third of respondents had experienced cystitis at some time, and 29 per cent complained of a leak of urine when coughing or laughing. Nineteen per cent said they went to the toilet more than seven times a day.

The survey also found that bladder problems came second only to sexual problems as a subject participants would not feel comfortable talking about with a friend.

Incontact has produced a free booklet about bladder problems, A Healthy Bladder – and what to do if things go wrong, which includes a pull-out symptom and treatment guide that patients can fill out and take to their doctor.

Incontact is the UK charity for people with bladder and bowel problems. Formed in 1989 by a group of patients and health professionals, it provides information and support to people with these conditions, and also to their carers and the health care staff who look after them.

For copies of the booklet, write to: Incontact, United House, North Road, London N7 9DP; tel: 0870 770 3246; e-mail: info@incontact.org or visit: www.incontact.org

**Bog Standard campaign**

Health and education organisations have teamed up to launch Bog Standard, a national campaign to improve the standard of provision and access to toilet facilities in schools. The Bog Standard campaign is an initiative of the Enuresis Resource & Information Centre (ERIC), the Community Practitioners’ and Health Visitors’ Association (CPHVA), School Councils UK and the British Toilet Association. The campaign is actively continuing the Water is Cool in School campaign, launched by ERIC in October 2000.

The state of school toilets, lack of privacy, and school rules that restrict toilet access, are frequent complaints by young people and cause many to avoid drinking water and using toilets at school. There is growing evidence of the impact this can have on children’s health, well-being and learning.

A survey of toilets and drinking water in schools is being carried out across the country by the CPHVA.

The aims of the Bog Standard campaign are to:

- Raise public awareness of the health and learning benefits to children of improved school toilet facilities;
- Raise the standard of provision and access to toilet facilities in primary and secondary schools nationally;
- Increase public awareness of the health benefits to children of drinking water regularly during the day;
- Improve quality of provision and access to fresh drinking water in primary and secondary schools;
- Ensure that UK and EU regulations adopt and enforce acceptable minimum standards for access to and provision of drinking water and toilet facilities for all young people in schools.

For more details contact ERIC campaign organiser Nickie Brander on e-mail: nickie@brander.org.uk (see p50).

**National audit of chronic constipation in the community**

Constipation is a major health problem, especially in high-risk groups such as people with reduced mobility or neurological problems, those living in institutions, or older people. A national audit of chronic constipation in the community, which involved 923 patients living at home or in residential or nursing homes, has indicated problems of poorly controlled constipation, a high level of impaction and wide use of rectal interventions. The audit provides evidence of complex, ineffective and/or inappropriate laxative-prescribing linked to suboptimal bowel care.


**Evaluation of absorbent products for dribble incontinence**

The CPE Network Product Evaluation (CPE) Network is planning a multicentre evaluation of absorbent products for men with dribble incontinence.

Penile pouches and leaf-style products are designed to contain the light/dribble incontinence that many men experience, often in association with benign prostatic hyperplasia or radical prostatectomy. Although these products are potentially very useful for men unable to use a urinary sheath or appliance, there has been no research on their effectiveness. The CPE Network study plans to:

- Evaluate all penile pouches and leafs;
- Compare the pouches with the leafs;
- Compare both groups with a washable pant with integral absorbent pad, and a small disposable shaped pad.

Eighty men will be recruited from across the UK. To be chosen, they must be over 18 years of age and normally use a product for light/dribble incontinence.

The CPE Network will liaise with the subjects who will test up to 15 products for a maximum of one week per product. Testing will begin in late autumn 2003. Results will appear in a report by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, to be circulated throughout the NHS, and in a selection of professional journals.

The CPE Network needs help with recruitment. If you know men who fit the above criteria and would like to know more about the study, contact Lena Pettersson on 0207 288 5305 or Margaret Macaulay on 0207 288 3178.

For a summary of a recent CPE Network evaluation of disposable products for women with light incontinence, see p69.