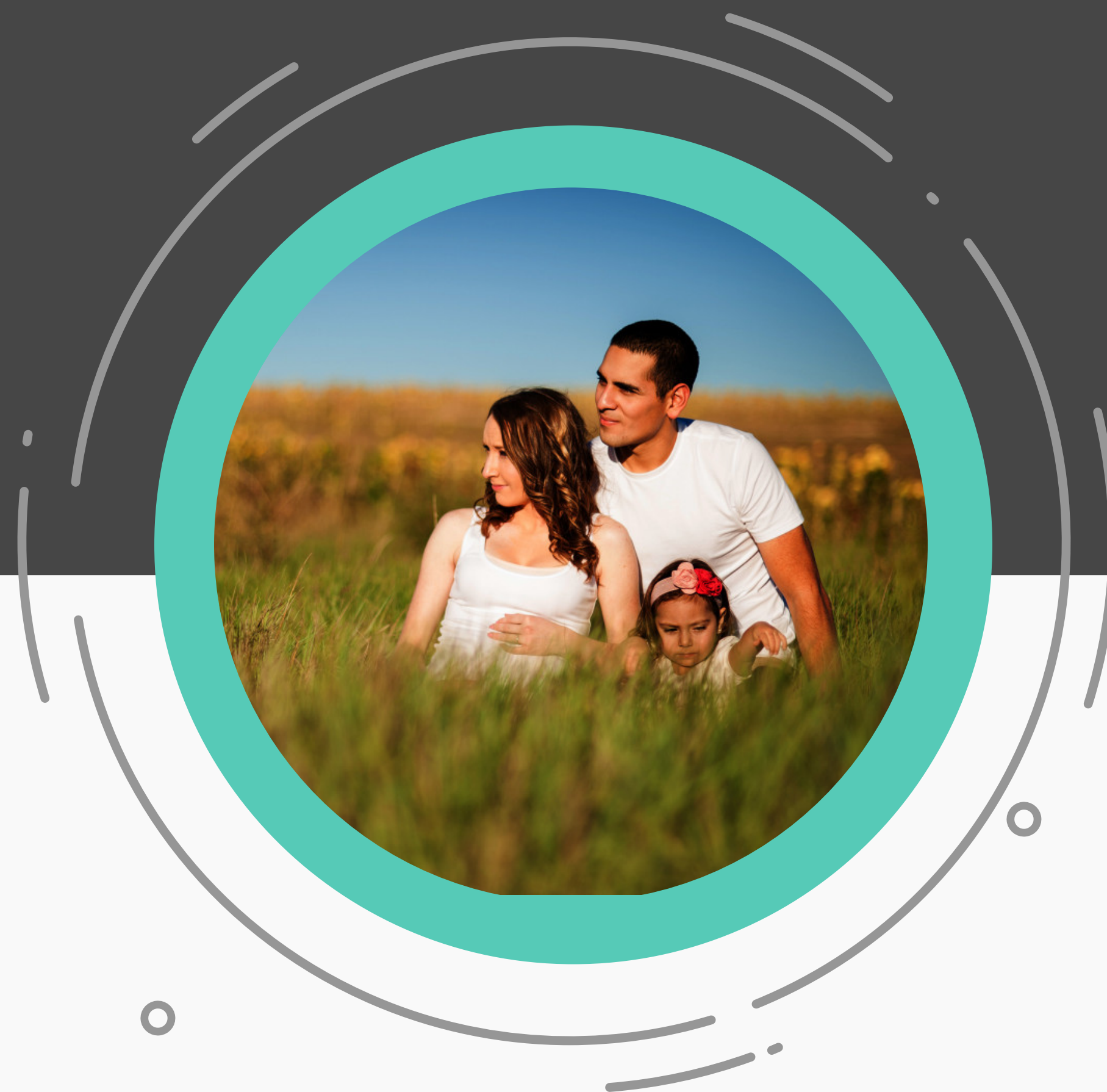




The Prostate Clinic

Post prostatectomy incontinence

How we can help after your upcoming procedure



Dr Tom Shannon

Losing control of your bladder is probably the most distressing part of the prostate cancer journey. Whilst many women of a similar age experience incontinence, men rarely do. The good news is that most men recover their incontinence with time, but of course the shorter that time, the better. Prostate cancer is a journey and we are here to help support you along the way. Understanding the issues is key to getting you back to normal as soon as possible.

Why does incontinence happen?

Incontinence can be a normal part of ageing with 3 - 11% of men and 3 to 17% of women experiencing incontinence. Normally, urine is stored in your bladder. When your bladder is full, muscles relax and all your urine passes through the prostate, past the external sphincter and into the urethra. Although we don't understand everything about what causes incontinence, the prostate is a crucial part in men. Cough / sneeze type leakage is very rare for men when they have their prostate. Removing the prostate can disrupt some of the supportive continence mechanisms, but the biggest problem may simply be that cork in the stopper has been removed. Prostates alone can effectively block the flow of urine, especially when large. The sphincter that is downstream may be out of condition and lazy. None of this is a problem, until cancer comes along and the prostate has to come out. Once everything has healed, the anatomy is much more like a woman's anatomy than a man's. This means your risk of cough / sneeze type leakage increases. For a good video explanation, visit <https://vimeo.com/188759839>

What factors affect my risk of incontinence?

There are several factors that affect your risk

Patient factors

- Age - is an independent risk factor for incontinence after surgery
- Having a large prostate - usually means a weak sphincter and more dissection
- Being overweight - is a major issue.
- High pressure on the bladder from fat in the abdomen
- Preoperative difficulty passing urine - affects bladder functions
- Previous prostate surgery - may weaken the sphincter
- Poor general health - poor muscle mass and tone is linked to incontinence
- Smoking - lung disease and coughing is a problem
- The length of your urethral sphincter - you are born with a set length that cannot be changed
- Poor sensation of pelvic floor
- Depression - increases incontinence risk
- Some medications

Disease factors

- Larger cancers
- High grade cancers not suitable for nerve sparing
- Cancer invading the bladder, nerves or sphincter

Surgical factors

- Surgeon experience and good surgical technique (minimal bleeding, tension and diathermy)
- Nerve preservation
- Sphincter length preservation
- Anastamotic contractures (scarring at join of bladder and sphincter after surgery)
- Time of catheterisation - prolonged catheterisation is not desirable

What can I do before surgery to reduce my risk?

1. Stop smoking
2. Lose weight - you should try to have an abdominal circumference less than 95cm.
3. Learn pelvic floor exercises and practice them

What can I expect after catheter removal?

Initially continence can feel quite poor, with most of the urine going into the pad. This is frustrating, as you may be feeling over the surgery in most other ways, Incontinence often improves in the first few days to become more manageable. As a rule, try not to do things that cause you to leak. This may mean taking it easier than you want to. Good continence takes time. We are waiting for the sphincter to improve and the bladder to settle. Try not to stress the system too much, it will not be very forgiving. Remember, everyone gets incontinence, but it is rare for treatment to be needed to correct it. We have to wait, as frustrating as that is. Men are hard wired to solve problems when they face them. You cannot exercise or will the problem away.

What can I do after catheter removal?

Avoid - coffee, tea, alcohol

Limit your fluid intake - you don't need to drink as much as you think. The commonest mistake is following well meaning advice to 'drink plenty of water.' Your sphincter has a pressure limit, which when exceeded will allow urine to leak. You cannot fill or stretch your bladder early on. A bladder that fills slowly can hold more than one that fills quickly.

Rest - leakage is much worse when you are tired. Don't get over tired. Rest in the afternoons and sleep well at night. You need it.

Consider medication - if you are rushing to the toilet, medication can help.

Don't get constipated

See a continence physiotherapist - a good continence physiotherapist can give you tips and tricks and ensure you are doing your exercises properly. Many men don't need them, but they can be invaluable if you do.

How much water should I drink?

You should drink enough to avoid constipation (benefiber helps trap water in the bowels and should be taken every day). More water than that will just fill your pads. You should aim for a urine that is yellow to mid yellow, never, ever clear. Please see below. You should know that most of your required fluid intake comes from the food you eat. In a healthy diet with lots of vegetables and fruit, supplementary water may not be needed.

Avoid

Acceptable

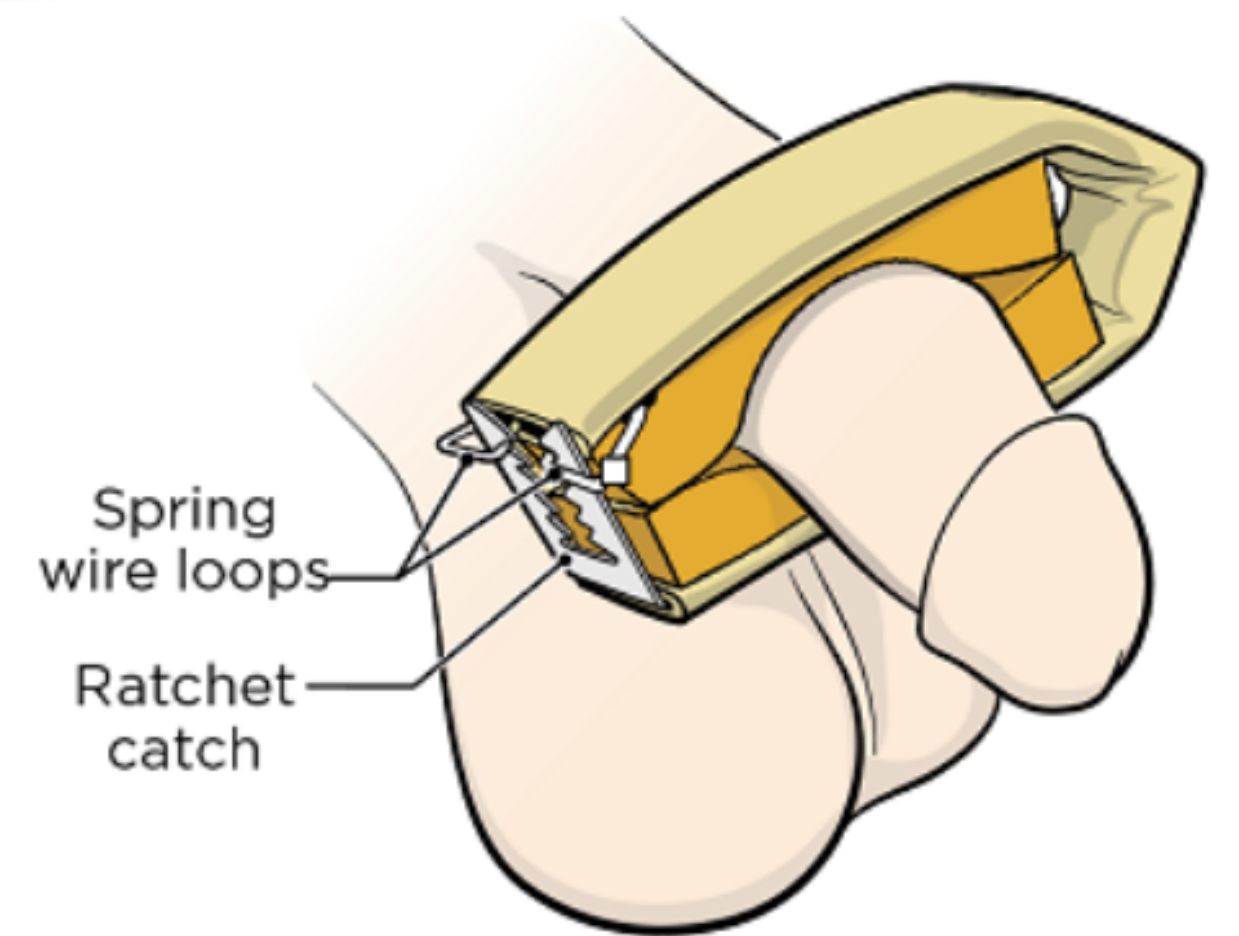
Ideal

How often should I change my pad?

At first, you will change them as soon as you notice they are filling. Each pad has a certain capacity. Try to get close to this. Pads should keep the skin dry. If you are experiencing skin irritation or significant smell, you are leaving the pads on too long.

What is a penile clamp and how do they work?

Penile clamps are an externally worn device that stop leakage. They are good and bad. They can be effective, but can also put back pressure on the sphincter and cause damage to the urethra. They are best used for short periods, such as social engagements.



What is a realistic rate of improvement?

Everyone is different and you may have some complicating factors that slow your recovery. Most men still get there, without help, even if they have some underlying issues. By 6 - 8 weeks, most men have a good degree of control in normal situations, but can leak later in the day, with alcohol or with exertion. Continence receivers gradually. Firstly men are dry at night and when laying down. Next they can be dry when sitting, then standing, then walking. Most men have better control in the mornings that progresses to longer in the day. Exercise can often be done early on, but non weight bearing, non impact exercise is easiest for continence.

I can't tell when I need to go? Is this normal?

Some men experience altered sensation and desire to void after surgery. It is more likely with bigger prostates and higher stage cancers. Losing sensation is important, because you can lose the normal warning signs that the bladder is full. If you are leaking only when the bladder is full and not at other times, it can help to use timed voiding. Start by setting an alarm every hour and increasing the intervals. If you have a stable fluid intake, this can get your bladder into a good routine. We need to try and get your bladder to hold for at least a couple of hours to allow you to get on with your life.

What can I do if I am not improving?

Whilst for most men, it is a matter of time before they become dry, it can be a frustrating experience if you feel you are not making progress. The reasons for a lack of progress can be complex and require further investigation. Please contact us to discuss what can be done.

About Us

The Prostate Clinic is Perth's first multidisciplinary centre dedicated to the prevention and management of prostate disease and men's health based at Hollywood Private Hospital, Nedlands. Prostate disease is a common condition, affecting 1 in 2 men in their lifetimes, making it a problem that we all need to think about. Prostate cancer affects 1 in 5 men during their lifetime and is the second most common cause of cancer death in Australian men. However, prostate cancer is highly curable if found early and at The Prostate Clinic we are devoted to reducing the impact of this disease through awareness, early detection and expert care. With over 15 years' experience and thousands of prostate cancer patients treated, The Prostate Clinic brings together a team of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, dieticians, exercise physiologists and psychologists to deliver optimal patient care.

Contact Us

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