

Improving continence in children and young people with neurodisability: a systematic review and survey

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Learning to go to the toilet is an important skill. Becoming continent involves knowing when you need to go, holding on until you find the right place, going to the toilet, cleaning and getting dressed again.

Many children and young people with special educational needs or disability can learn to become clean and dry, sometimes with help or equipment. Advice is not consistent about the best ways to assess and treat continence problems for children and young people with neurodisability.

This research aimed to find out how families and professionals measure and improve continence, and if there was evidence about which treatments are useful.

We brought together the results of studies that have tested ways of assessing and improving toilet training for children and young people with special educational needs or disability.

We carried out four online surveys with health professionals, education and care staff, parent carers, and disabled young people.

We brought together and explained the findings from the surveys and the studies with help from parent carers and professionals.

Approaches to improving continence vary depending on whether or not the child or young person's nerves and muscles that control their bladder and bowel work properly. Children and young people with conditions affecting the nerves and muscles of their bladder and bowel are often helped by medical or surgical treatments. Children and young people with conditions such as learning disability or autism may benefit from behavioural therapies to help them learn to use the toilet.

There is poor evidence for how well treatments work and whether or not they are value for money. More and better research is needed to make sure that children and young people are able to be clean and dry without pads, maximising their independence, dignity and comfort. This also requires an adequate number of fully accessible toilets in the community.

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This report

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