

Can a Child with Incontinence go Swimming?

Yes, many children with spina bifida regularly attend swimming lessons and have found swimming an excellent way to improve both fitness and strength. However, there are a few things that need consideration before attending the pool.

Is there likely to be an accident in the pool?

Do not assume that because the child has spina bifida or because they are bowel incontinent that they will have an accident in the pool. Preparation can be done before hand, at home in the morning or just before entering the pool, to ensure the child has an accident-free day in the pool.

Will the child be compliant?

It is very important to ask your child if he or she wants to participate in the swimming program, and whether he or she agrees with the bowel management strategy to be used for this activity. This is particularly important for those children who may have to use temporary strategies to remain accident free in the pool.

Preparation at home simply involves the everyday routine done for an accident free day at school, such as an enema, bowel washout, or timed toileting with medications.

Other temporary management strategies include:

- **Disposable Swim Nappies:** For small children, swim nappies, such as Huggies “Little Swimmers” or Aldi’s “Mamia” swim nappies are a popular and effective choice.
- **Anal Plugs:** These are small, soft plugs, which are inserted much like a tampon into the anus, and are able to stay there for up to 12 hours. They will keep the child completely accident free during that time. Research on use of anal plugs by children with spina bifida suggests that the larger size is preferred by most.
- **Washable Incontinence Swimwear:** For older children, reusable swimwear can be chosen to contain any bowel accidents, and can be very discreet, such as the options pictured below. These options are available for purchase online.



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For further information about maintaining social continence for swimming, ask your SBH Queensland occupational therapist, Ph: 3844 4600.