Your Guide to Stoma Support, Hernia Prevention and Management

Includes practical advice from Julia Thompson RN PhD, a specialist Stomal Therapy Nurse with 40 years acute care experience who has recently been appointed as an Assoc Prof of Nursing.

Support Rating Guide
To assist selection all support garments are colour coded to indicate the level of support.
Introduction

Many people are not aware of parastomal hernias until they develop one (an abdominal hernia formed in association with a stoma). They can range from a small, inconvenient bulge to a large, often painful, complication.

Surgical correction does not have a high success rate so many people are left to manage the hernia, as best they can, in conjunction with their stoma.

The aim of this booklet is to raise awareness of the potential for a hernia to form after stoma surgery, and the best methods of prevention as well as providing practical advice towards the non-surgical management of an existing hernia.

We are extremely fortunate to have Julia Thompson contribute specialist nursing advice and direction for this booklet. Julia Thompson has 40 years of acute care nursing experience, strong interest and experience in parastomal hernias and high academic qualifications in her chosen field.

A paper on the subject by Julia Thompson and Lesley Jack was published in 1995 and can be viewed at [www.stomasupportgarments.com](http://www.stomasupportgarments.com)

To complement Julia Thompson’s advice we have also included the full range of Omnigon Support Garments. We believe these garments form the most comprehensive and effective range of stoma support wear available worldwide. Each garment has been designed and manufactured for the purpose of managing a hernia in its different stages.

You will find that the range includes a variety of styles and fabrics to accommodate different body shapes, support needs and activity levels. There are, however, two features common to every garment:

  Comfort – every effort has been made from design to fabric selection to make each garment as comfortable as possible to encourage regular use.

  Full Support – every garment provides full support to the parastomal area. Julia’s advice outlines why support products with a hole, or flange, are not recommended.

It is hoped, that by a raised awareness, the following of some practical advice and the appropriate use of support garments many people can prevent a parastomal hernia or manage an existing one more comfortably.
The development of a hernia is a relatively common problem following ostomy surgery.

Hernias may occur in a surgical wound (called incisional hernias) and/or around a stoma (called parastomal hernias) and this booklet describes how to recognize, prevent and manage them without surgery.

A hernia presents as a bulge and results from the abnormal protrusion of an organ or part of an organ through a weak area or gap in the tissues that surround or contain it.

The incision through which the surgeon performs the operation is one area of potential weakness where a hernia may occur. Also, during stoma construction, the surgeon makes another opening separate from the main wound to allow bowel to pass through the abdominal wall and be sutured to the skin. This opening may enlarge, allowing intestine, fat or other abdominal tissue to bulge through it around the stoma. Hernias can lie within the layers of the abdominal wall, or just under the skin, or they may protrude into the spout of the stoma. The hernia has three parts: the weakness or opening through which it bulges, the hernial sac, and its contents.

There are inconsistent reports about how common it is to develop a parastomal hernia, however a review of 16,470 people with all types of stomas registered with the American United Ostomy Association revealed 30% incidence. Other studies indicate hernias are more common in those with an end colostomy, but may occur with all types of stomas.

While there is no scientific evidence about how long it takes for parastomal hernia formation, a study of 500 people with incisional hernias (at the site of surgical wounds) shows that 67.8% developed gradually within 1 year of surgery, and a parastomal hernia is a type of incisional hernia so it is likely the same time frame applies. These statistics make a strong case for ostomates to adopt preventative measures, particularly in the first year after surgery.

Recognition of a Parastomal Hernia

Hernias are easier to see when you are sitting or standing, particularly if you increase intra-abdominal pressure by coughing or sneezing. While doing this, check that both sides of your abdomen are the same size and shape. If there is a noticeable bulge around or near the stoma, lie on your back for a few minutes and see if the bulge is reducible (falls back or can be pushed back into the abdomen) if not (called nonreducible) you need to see a doctor in case the material in the hernia sac becomes trapped (called strangulation) causing pain, intestinal obstruction and sometimes in rare cases causing gangrene and needing emergency surgical repair.

Many hernias cause no symptoms and are barely noticeable, some are mildly uncomfortable while others cause a dull ache, dragging or heavy sensation.

As hernias grow and stretch the skin around the stoma, the stomal opening may enlarge in diameter requiring progressively bigger holes in the appliances. Maintaining a seal may be a problem because abdominal skin alternates between stretching and relaxing as you change position from lying to sitting to standing and the hernia changes size. Wearing a support garment can help prevent these changes in size and relieve the discomfort, especially if you lie down and position the garment while the hernia is reduced (pushed back inside).

If you suspect a hernia, consult your stomal therapist or doctor who will probably ask about your symptoms and examine your abdomen while you are lying, sitting and standing.

Most hernias do not need to be surgically corrected, in fact because of the high recurrence rate, most surgeons prefer you to try to manage a hernia conservatively as long as possible. This is where the range of support garments is very useful with moderate support for everyday use and prevention and firmer garments for use when a hernia is present.
Prevention

Some people are prone to hernias because they are born with a genetic inability to produce collagen (protein) to repair and strengthen muscle and they may already have a history of hernias in their body.

Some people are born with a normal ability to produce collagen, but lose it due to malnutrition, infection, corticosteroid use or smoking and they should see a doctor to try to correct these problems.

For these people it may be worthwhile wearing Diamond Plus support Briefs, Boxers or Waistband as soon as is comfortable post-operatively to help support muscles while they heal.

Some people are prone to hernias because of increased pressure from inside their abdomen pushing out on the weakened muscles.

Examples include:
- Obesity – Lose weight and maintain a healthy weight.
- Chronic respiratory conditions with coughing – Don’t smoke. If you do smoke, quit. This also increases blood flow to muscles trying to heal after surgery. Deep breathing exercises can help ease chronic cough. Always support your wound/stoma when coughing.
- Persistent sneezing – Treat allergies promptly. Support your wound/stoma when sneezing.
- Chronic constipation causes pressure in the bowel – To prevent constipation drink plenty of fluids (8 glasses a day) and practice good nutrition (plenty of fibre and bulk in the diet) and consider taking regular fibre or a bulking agent to maintain a regular soft bowel motion.
- Ascites - Any collection of fluid in abdominal cavity causes pressure and needs medical diagnosis and management.
- Prostatism makes it necessary to strain when passing urine through a narrowed opening and needs medical attention.

If you have any of these conditions, then it is worthwhile seeking corrective treatment.

It is also worthwhile wearing a support garment to help reinforce the muscles while you are coughing, sneezing or otherwise straining.

Technical factors during the operation are believed to be of significance in parastomal hernia formation, but are generally beyond your control.

They include the size of slit made by the surgeon and the condition of your tissues during and after the operation. If, for example, you had a wound infection, then muscles may not have healed well, and if you required mechanical ventilation post-operatively then this increases internal pressure.

While you cannot change what has already happened, you can elect to wear support garments to reinforce muscles while they heal.

To summarize, so far the ways to prevent hernias developing or at least minimize their size, include: losing weight and maintaining a healthy weight, don’t smoke, avoid coughing, sneezing and straining, and always support the stoma and wound when straining, avoid constipation by drinking plenty of fluids and taking a high fibre diet or bulking agents.
The exercises below are to assist in the prevention of hernias. After your stoma surgery, consult your Doctor before commencing exercises. If you have an existing hernia you should consult your Doctor or physiotherapist before commencing exercises.

**PELVIC TILT**

Lie on a firm surface with knees bent up.

The following parts should be touching the floor/bed:

- Soles of feet
- Bottom
- Mid/upper back and shoulders
- Head

There should be a space under your neck and lower back so you can slide your hand between your lower back and the floor/bed.

Inhale (normally, not deeply) then as you exhale pull your tummy down and tilt your bottom upwards slightly while pressing the middle of your back down into the bed/floor.

Hold for 2 seconds.
Let go slowly.
Repeat 10 times daily.

This is not a race.
It is an opportunity for healing and strengthening.
If it is tiring you, go gently.

If you don’t reach the floor/bed the first time it doesn’t matter – success is measured by progress.

**KNEE ROLLING**

Lie on your back with your knees bent up and feet flat on the bed/floor.

Pull your tummy in.

Keeping knees together, roll them steadily from side to side.

Repeat 10 times daily.

You may not get a lot of movement initially because it is uncomfortable.

Keep a smooth and gentle motion going within your comfort zone.

Mobility will improve with practice.

**ABDOMINAL SIT UPS**

Lie on your back on a firm surface with knees bent and feet flat on the bed/floor.

Do not anchor your feet or have anyone hold them.

Place your hands on the front of your thighs and pull your tummy in.

Lift your head off the pillow, hold for 3 seconds and then slowly return to starting position.

Repeat 10 times daily.
Physical Exercise and Returning to Work

Light aerobic activity such as walking can be resumed a few days after surgery and is good for you because it increases blood flow and thus aids healing. Likewise deep breathing exercises, but remember to support your wound if you cough. You can build up aerobic activity to 30 minutes every second day as you feel well enough. Many people find the Diamond Plus briefs and boxers very useful when undertaking exercise post-operatively because they support their muscles and also support the appliance, thus enhancing feelings of security.

People who engage in regular exercise generally have stronger well-toned muscles and don’t develop hernias – unless they have an injury! But this is what has happened during surgery – there has been an injury ... so you need to be careful ... even if you are usually very fit and exercise regularly. Firstly you need to allow the injured muscles to heal for about 6-8 weeks. Then you can support the muscles (eg by wearing a support garment) while you exercise. If you already have a bulge or hernia it should be reduced first, then the garment applied, then the exercise ... and start gently. If the hernia or bulge is small then Support Pants or Diamond Plus (Support Rating 3) may be adequate, but if it is a large bulge or hernia then a stronger control is needed, such as Support Briefs for Her or IsoFlex Support Belt (Support Rating 4) or Total Control or KoolKnit support Belts (Support Rating 5).

Recumbent exercises (done while you are lying down or reclining) are appropriate because the position encourages any bulge to reduce itself – see the descriptions of pelvic tilt, knee rolling and abdominal sit ups in this booklet. There are even bicycles designed to allow the exerciser to recline while pedalling. If wishing to try other exercises it is advisable to consult your doctor or physiotherapist.

To avoid infections, swimming in artificial pools and spas is not recommended until wounds are completely healed. Swimming in the ocean should be avoided for 6-8 weeks since currents and waves can put a strain on your body. Diamond Plus briefs and boxers can be worn under board shorts/ swimming costumes to provide support and security whilst swimming, particularly in the ocean.

After you have recovered from your surgery and resumed your normal activities you may choose to wear light or intermediate support garments all day as a preventive measure (Support Rating 3), and even if you do not have a hernia or bulge it would be sensible to wear a support belt (Support Rating 4 or 5) when playing vigorous sports such as golf, tennis or surfing. Mechanical strain like lifting, pushing or pulling heavy objects can induce secondary changes in cells that repair muscles.

These activities also involve closing off your throat, which serves to increase abdominal pressure and therefore the size of the hernia. Always use proper lifting techniques and do not attempt to lift weights that are too heavy for you or that require you to close off your throat and tense your abdominal muscles.

If you regularly engage in hard physical work as part of your job or hobbies (eg carpenter, builder, cleaner, gardener) then even if you do not have a hernia or bulge, it would be sensible to wear a Total Control or KoolKnit Support Belt during those activities and gentle or intermediate support garments at other times.

How soon you return to work depends on the type of work you do. If it is physically demanding then you may need to wait 6-8 weeks after surgery to avoid putting strain on your body. Driving a car puts a strain on your abdominal muscles and should be avoided for at least a month after surgery. Total Control or KoolKnit Support Belts are available in a narrower width which is ideal for support when driving.

In most cases they will also prevent the seat belt from rubbing directly on the stoma.

Many forms of sexual activity put a strain on your body and you may need to wait 6-8 weeks after surgery. If your surgery involved the rectal or vaginal areas you may be too tender there for several months and should not have intercourse until the area feels comfortable.

The Diamond Plus Waistband not only provides support during sexual activity it also discreetly covers the appliance and minimizes possibility of dislodgement. It is always wise to ensure the appliance is empty prior to engaging in sexual activity. If you already have a hernia it would be prudent to empty the appliance, reduce the hernia then apply Total Control or KoolKnit Support Belt prior to engaging in vigorous sexual activity.
Many hernias cause no symptoms and are barely noticeable, some are mildly uncomfortable while others cause a dull ache, dragging or heavy sensation.

Wearing a support garment can relieve the discomfort especially if you lie down and position the garment while the hernia is reduced (pushed back inside). Some people find that the discomfort increases as the day progresses and only wear the garment later in the day - this is a personal choice.

As hernias grow and stretch the skin around the stoma, the stomal opening may enlarge in diameter requiring progressively bigger holes in the appliances. You may also need to change to a different style of appliance that has a larger or more flexible adhesive area, or add tape or skin friendly HydroFrame to help anchor the edges of the appliance onto the contours of the bulge. Maintaining a seal may also be a problem because abdominal skin alternates between stretching and relaxing as you change position from lying to sitting to standing and the hernia changes size – Eakin seals can be useful in maintaining a seal in such circumstances.

Wearing a support garment can help prevent these changes in size as you change position, especially if you lie down and position the support garment while the hernia is reduced (pushed back inside). Do not be tempted to wear a very tight belt with a hole in it to keep the appliance in place, this can have the negative effect of causing the stoma to prolapse (protrude) and then there is a risk of damaging it or its circulation.

A small number of parastomal hernias become complicated, usually when they are large. Complications can include:

- **Skin problems due to chronic leakages** – see a stomal therapist to get the most appropriate appliance.

- **Difficulties with previously successful colostomy irrigation.** If there is difficulty introducing irrigation fluid, or prolonged or incomplete evacuation, then stop the procedure.

- **Back pain due to failure of weakened abdominal muscles to give their usual support** – wearing a firm support garment or belt should help.

- **Respiratory problems due to the diaphragm not working together with the weakened abdominal wall** – wearing a firm support garment or belt should help.

These are good reasons to maintain contact with your stomal therapist or doctor to monitor the hernia and manage any complications.

The most serious complication of any abdominal hernia (incisional or parastomal) involves entrapment of loops of bowel in the hernia sac leading to cutting off of their blood supply (called strangulation). This would cause change in colour of the stoma, bowel blockage and severe pain and you must consult a doctor urgently.

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**Belt Measuring Instructions**

1. Lie flat on your back on a firm surface and allow your abdomen to reduce (settle back to its normal position) as far as possible.

2. Using a tailors tape take a firm measurement over the area of the stoma or hernia.

3. Write this measurement down and check the size chart of the product you have selected for the correct order code for your size. You can also use the same method in measuring other Omnigon support garments.

Visit [www.stomasupportgarments.com](http://www.stomasupportgarments.com) for more detailed guides to measuring and fitting.
Diamond Plus Support Unisex Boxers and Briefs

- Advanced seamless technology providing maximum comfort, no raised seams and therefore no pressure marks or chaffing.
- Seamless circle knit with unique diamond panel to flex and move with the body.
- High performance fabric keeps the skin dry and at a comfortable temperature.
- Diamond panel waistband that provides extra support where it’s needed.
- Two way stretch fabric that moulds to the body.

Australian SAS Allowance – 6 Boxers / Briefs, per calendar year.*

### SIZE CHART

<table>
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<tr>
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</table>

The Support garments are ideal for every day wear after surgery and particularly as you resume light exercise. Both the unisex boxers & briefs can be worn with a support belt for more physical activity. The waistbands are very discreet for use in public changing areas, during sexual activity, etc.
Men’s Support Pants

Firm All Over Support

Comfort Design and Fabric
✓ Tailored for a comfortable fit to body shape.
✓ Firm yet flexible support.

Dark Tone Fabric
✓ Discreet appearance, similar to a normal undergarment.

Comfort Crotch
✓ Designed with a longer line crotch for all day comfort.

Full Hernia and Abdominal Support
✓ Reduced hernia discomfort.
✓ Slimmer profile.
✓ Double front panel.

Front Opening
✓ Traditional front opening for convenience.

These pants provide all over support and have a double front panel for extra strength. They are tailored for comfort and ideal for everyday use either for prevention or to support a small bulge.

Australian SAS Allowance - 6 per calendar year.*

<table>
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<tr>
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Support Pants For Her

Maximum Support Comfort and Freedom

**Comfort Design and Fabric**
- Tailored for a comfortable fit to body shape.
- Firm yet flexible support.

**Choice of Colour**
- Neutral
- Black

**Double Front Panel**
- Extra support where it is required.
- An opening can be made in the inner panel to create a pocket for your pouch.

**Full Hernia and Abdominal Support**
- Reduced hernia discomfort.
- Slimmer profile.

Australian SAS Allowance - 6 per calendar year.*

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<thead>
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These pants provide all over support and have a double front panel for extra strength. They are tailored for comfort and ideal for everyday use either for prevention or to support a small bulge.
Diamond Plus Support Waistband

Latest in Advanced Support Garment Technology:
✓ Discreet and comfortable.
✓ Can be worn discreetly during intimate moments, public changing areas, swimming etc.

Flexible to body shape:
✓ New seamless circular knit.
✓ Two way stretch to mould to the body.

Skin Friendly:
✓ Revolutionary breathable fabric for maximum comfort.
✓ Ideal for any climate.

Australian SAS Allowance – 3 waistbands, per calendar year.*

SIZE CHART

<table>
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<td>B-WBDP-3L-B</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Support garments are ideal for every day wear after surgery and particularly as you resume light exercise. Both the unisex boxers & briefs can be worn with a support belt for more physical activity. The waistbands are very discreet for use in public changing areas, during sexual activity, etc.
Support Briefs For Her

A modern cut brief with an IsoFlex support band right where it’s needed!

- Soft, silky tricot / lycra fabric all over.
- Hidden under the fabric is an IsoFlex band that provides firm yet comfortable support, similar to the IsoFlex Support Belt.
- Choice of Colour Neutral or black.
- Small, Medium and Large available with a 15cm band.
- Large, XLarge and XXLarge available with a 20cm band.

A modern, high waisted brief with an IsoFlex support band providing excellent abdominal support. These briefs are ideal for all activities and a great compromise between pants and a belt.

Australian SAS Allowance - 6 per calendar year.*

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<thead>
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<th>SIZE</th>
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For simple, effective Hernia and Abdominal Support.

Only with an adjustable Support Belt can most Ostomates find the correct balance between comfortable support and the proper function of their stoma.

✓ Wide, soft closure.
✓ Adjustable comfort settings.
✓ Sits flat with non-curled edging.
✓ Available in a choice of 20 and 26 cm widths.

A comfort / support setting for:
All times of the day. A wide range of daily activities: swimming, golfing, gardening, housework.

Made from a cotton based fabric this belt provides an excellent balance of comfort and support. IsoFlex fabric moulds to the body and flexes easily with movement. It will also allow the skin to breathe in hot conditions. Excellent support for all activities.

Australian SAS Allowance - 3 per calendar year.*

<table>
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<td>XLarge</td>
<td>120 – 135 cm</td>
<td>BOM 104</td>
<td>BOM 204</td>
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Total Control Support Belt

Unlimited adjustment to balance firmer support with a comfortable fit.

Infinite Adjustment
✓ As the closure will grip anywhere along the length of the belt this provides the wearer with Total Control of the amount of support required at any time, for any activity.
✓ Much easier to get the right size and no more “between” sizes.

Multi Panel Construction
✓ Each of the panels or bands in the support belt has a degree of independent movement which can provide firmer support to raised areas and more relaxed support to others.
✓ The Total Control can be ordered in a two panel width of 15 cm, or a three panel width of 22.5 cm or a four panel width of 30 cm.

Slimline Profile
✓ As it does not need a landing pad the Total Control support belt has a lower, slimline profile that makes it very discreet under clothing.

The Total Control can be ordered in a two panel width of 15 cm, or a three panel width of 22.5 cm or a four panel width of 30 cm.

Australian SAS Allowance - 3 per calendar year.*

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>TCB 904</td>
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This belt is 15% “stronger” than IsoFlex and provides firm support in all situations. Ideal for physical activity, either active sports or work. As the belt will fasten on itself it allows maximum adjustment for both comfort and support. Excellent support for developed hernias.
Firm yet Flexible
Slim Line Profile
Vented Fabric

Comfortable Support
✓ KoolKnit fabric has been designed to mould to the body and provide firm, yet comfortable, abdominal support.

Discreet Profile
✓ The KoolKnit Support Belt is very discreet with a low profile and a choice of beige or black.

Aerated Fabric
✓ With vents knitted into the fabric it allows the skin to breathe and also dries quickly making it ideal for all activities.

Choice of Three Widths
✓ Available in three widths of 17cm, 21.5cm or 26cm.

Australian SAS Allowance - 3 per calendar year.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>MEASUREMENT</th>
<th>17cm BLACK</th>
<th>17cm BEIGE</th>
<th>21.5cm BLACK</th>
<th>21.5cm BEIGE</th>
<th>26cm BLACK</th>
<th>26cm BEIGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>75 - 90cm</td>
<td>KKB401B</td>
<td>KKB401N</td>
<td>KKB501B</td>
<td>KKB501N</td>
<td>KKB601B</td>
<td>KKB601N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>90 - 105cm</td>
<td>KKB402B</td>
<td>KKB402N</td>
<td>KKB502B</td>
<td>KKB502N</td>
<td>KKB602B</td>
<td>KKB602N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>105 - 120cm</td>
<td>KKB403B</td>
<td>KKB403N</td>
<td>KKB503B</td>
<td>KKB503N</td>
<td>KKB603B</td>
<td>KKB603N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XLarge</td>
<td>120 - 135cm</td>
<td>KKB404B</td>
<td>KKB404N</td>
<td>KKB504B</td>
<td>KKB504N</td>
<td>KKB604B</td>
<td>KKB604N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also 15% “stronger” than IsoFlex yet in a thinner fabric that moulds easily to the body. This belt is suitable for all activities and will support a developed hernia. As the fabric is vented to allow the skin to breathe it is recommended for hot and humid conditions and will also dry quickly.
To help select the right support garment for you, all products are colour coded according to the degree of support provided.

**RATING 3** garments provide **moderate** support and can be worn either for prevention or to support a small bulge.

**RATING 4** garments provide **intermediate** support and can be worn for prevention during physical activity or to support a more developed hernia.

**RATING 5** garments provide **firm** support (rating 4 + 15%) and can be worn for prevention physical activity or to support a more developed hernia.

In addition to the different levels of support the range of garments offers a variety of styles and fabrics to allow each individual a broad choice. The aim is for each person to be able to find the right level of support with a high degree of comfort to encourage regular use.

Omnigon also has an extensive range of Ostomy pouches and accessories available to help manage a stoma where a hernia is causing difficulties.

Please consult your stomal therapy nurse or contact Omnigon Customer Service for more information.

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*All Australian SAS allowances subject to DOHA approval.*

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**For more product information contact:**
Omnigon Customer Service

**1800 819 274 - Australia**
**0800 440 027 - New Zealand**
**www.stomasupportgarments.com**