

## A SPOTLIGHT ON... INCONTINENCE

**W**hen you hear the word 'incontinence', you might think it's just

something experienced by older people when they have little control over their bowels. But it can affect everyone! Anja Christoffersen, 20, was born with VACTERL association, a disorder that affects multiple body systems and left Anja incontinent. But despite her diagnosis, Anja pursued her dream of becoming a model, and at 16 she landed a modelling contract with an agency in Brisbane. A year later, she walked in Amsterdam Fashion Week. Now she's breaking down the stigma about her condition.



"To look at me you would think I am a normal, ambitious 20-year-old without a worry in the world. Behind the scenes, I have daily struggles with chronic health issues. When I was born, I couldn't get food into my body or get it out. In terms of bowel function, my diagnosis meant that I didn't have an anal sphincter, muscles, rectum or nerves, so I've been incontinent my whole life. I also face some chronic pain and other ongoing issues related to my bowels, reproductive and urinary systems.

"When I was 14, I attended a modelling course and I was told that I would never be able to show my surgery scars, and so modelling was probably something that I shouldn't pursue. But I stumbled

upon a casting when I was 16 and I had to walk the catwalk, be interviewed and have photos taken in my bikini. I still

had my scars from surgery on my stomach and a big one under my arm. I just didn't mention it and I acted confident and I was given a contract!

"It's important to help raise awareness of chronic health issues,

especially with the growth of social media where everyone seems so perfect as it creates an unrealistic expectation. Last

year, I decided to reach out to some of the online Facebook communities and share my story. I received an overwhelmingly positive response and I realised my story was helpful to others with similar conditions and there were a lot of people with similar issues. My goal now is to model more overseas and keep working in Australia. I am also focused on using that platform to become a role model for others who suffer from chronic health conditions such as VACTERL association, imperforate anus, incontinence and many more."

For more info, head to [inconfidence.org.au](http://inconfidence.org.au)

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