

The Comfort of Home®

Caregiver Assistance News

"CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS"

Living with Incontinence

Incontinence is a problem that involves the leakage of urine or feces over which the person has no control. Bladder management medications are available; other possible treatments include bladder training, exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor (Kegel exercises), biofeedback, surgery, electrical muscle stimulators, urinary catheters, prosthetic devices, or external collection devices. Not all doctors routinely ask about urinary function during an exam. If bladder control problems are an issue, tell your doctor about them.

A precise diagnosis for incontinence must be made in order to come up with an effective treatment plan. If the primary care doctor cannot solve the problem, consult an experienced urologist. Treatments for bladder control problems start with learning how to improve bladder symptoms and typically include exercises. Some people need medications, while others might need surgery. What's best for you depends on the type and severity of your bladder control problem.

Tip

Be sure the person in your care goes to the bathroom regularly, ideally every 2 to 3 hours. Use an alarm clock to keep track of the time.



Incontinence Specialists

- **Urogynecologist.** This is an obstetrician-gynecologist with additional training in problems that affect a woman's pelvic floor — the network of muscles that help support and control the bladder and other pelvic organs.
- **Urologist.** A urologist specializes in male and female urinary disorders, as well as the male reproductive system.



Managing Incontinence

Avoid alcohol, coffee, spicy foods, and citrus foods, which may irritate the bladder and increase the need to urinate.

- Give fluids at regular intervals to dilute the urine, which decreases irritation to the bladder.
- Provide clothing that can be easily removed.
- Keep a bedpan or a portable commode nearby.
- Use adult diapers under clothes.
- Keep the skin dry and clean. Urine on the skin can cause pressure sores and infection.

Your patience and understanding will help the person maintain confidence and self-respect.

Source: *Caregiving in The Comfort of Home*; www.MayoClinic.com; www.NAFC.org

Catheters

A Foley urinary catheter is a device made from rubber or plastic that drains urine from the body. It is inserted by a nurse through the urethra (a tube that connects the bladder to the outside of the body) into the bladder (an organ that collects urine).

A Foley catheter greatly increases the risk of infection. It is chosen as a last resort to manage incontinence.

Disposal of Body Fluids

- ⇒ Wear gloves (recommended for handling all body fluids).
- ⇒ Flush liquid and solid waste down the toilet.
- ⇒ Place used dressings and disposable (throwaway) pads in a sturdy plastic bag, tie securely, and place in a sealed container for collection.
- ⇒ If urine is highly concentrated due to a bladder infection or dehydration, do not use bleach. The combination of ammonia in the urine and bleach can cause toxic fumes.

Urinary Tract Infection

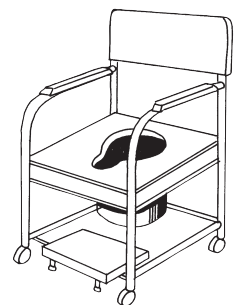
A urinary tract infection may be present if the person has any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Blood in the urine
- A burning feeling when voiding
- Cloudy urine with sediment (matter that settles to the bottom)
- Pain in the lower abdomen or lower back
- Fever and chills
- Foul-smelling urine
- A frequent, strong urge to void or frequent voiding

Using a Commode

If the mobile person is missing the toilet, get a toilet seat in a color that is different from the color of the floor. This may help him see the toilet better. If he is failing to cleanse the anal area, or failing to wash his hands, use tact to encourage him to do so. This will help prevent the spread of infections.

A portable commode is helpful for a person with limited mobility. The portable commode (with the pail removed) can be used over the toilet seat.



Taking Care of Yourself—Managing Anger

Caregivers can easily become stressed, and the natural response to stress is anger. But expressing your anger or frustration to the person in your care never helps. Find positive ways to express yourself:

- Vent your feelings in a caregiver support group. The people in the group will understand how you feel and they will help you find practical solutions.
- See a therapist, family counselor, or clergy.
- Remember that a chronic illness can change personality and behavior.
- Positive communication is the key to lowering stress in relationships. Avoid accusations such as: "You make me angry." Instead say: "Please try to understand that being a caregiver is sometimes difficult."



Resource for You

National Association for Continence

Offers publications and services, such as: brochures detailing what every woman and man should know about bladder and bowel control, disease-specific booklets on Multiple Sclerosis, spinal cord injury, and Parkinson's Disease, the Caregiver's Desk Reference and more.

Visit www.NAFC.org

Live Life Laughing!

People say that money isn't the key to happiness, but I think if you have enough money, you can have a key made.



Inspiration

*If you're going through hell,
keep going.*

~Winston Churchill

Don't Fall – Be Safe

Incontinence increases the risk of falls because of the rush to the bathroom to avoid leaking urine. Check to be sure you have done everything you can to improve the person's ability to remove clothing quickly and easily in the bathroom. Additionally, be sure the pathway to the bathroom is well-lit and safe with loose rugs tacked down. Try to shorten the time and effort it takes to get to the toilet.

The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

Ordering Info

From the publishers of

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SAFETY TIPS—Toileting and Alzheimer's Disease (AD)

Incontinence usually begins in the late part of the middle stage of AD. Most AD caregivers fear they will not be able to handle this condition, but many learn to take it in stride and find that it is not as awful as they expected. Knowledge of the appropriate products and how to use them will help relieve any discomfort you may feel.

Incontinence in AD may be caused by confusion in finding the bathroom, inability to get there on time, or a urinary tract infection. Be sure to ask the doctor if there could be a physical cause for the problem, rather than the progression of AD.

A regular toileting schedule and reading the signals when the person needs to go to the toilet may help the person to continue to use the toilet for a longer time. However, you will probably need to use protection for the bed, since the person may sleep through the urge to go.

Source: The Comfort of Home for Alzheimer's Disease

NEXT ISSUE... MENTAL HEALTH/DEPRESSION