



Incontinence

Although people of all ages have problems with incontinence through no fault of their own, it is a subject rarely discussed. A person may develop incontinence problems during the later stages of dementia due to confusion and memory loss. Urinary and faecal incontinence may be caused by a number of different medical conditions. **It is important to seek advice from your doctor when it occurs.**

This advice sheet offers practical suggestions which may help to improve or avoid incontinence for a person with dementia.

Having a routine can be helpful

Adequate food and fluid intake is essential. Regular toileting, e.g. two-three-hourly, may be helpful. Make sure the toilet is actually being used on each visit.

A gentle reminder may be needed

People with dementia may not notice, or may not be able to tell you when their bladder is full, or may start to walk to the toilet then forget their destination.

Use short words and short simple instructions. Watch for non-verbal clues, such as reaching for a belt or tugging at a zipper, restless behaviour or facial expression that may signal distress.

Wash the skin after any accident

It is important to keep the person's skin clean and dry to prevent rashes and sores.

Finding the toilet may be a problem

Leaving the toilet door open and putting a

sign or picture of a toilet on the door may be helpful. Paint the toilet door in a bright colour so it can be easily recognised. It might also be helpful to have the floor and the toilet seat in different colours. Leaving the toilet light on at night may also help the person to find the toilet.

Ensure the person is drinking enough fluids

At least 5-8 drinks each day are needed. Often people with dementia may forget to drink, or will be unaware of being thirsty. Jelly, iceblocks and ice-cream are useful to help increase fluid intake. There is sometimes a tendency to reduce drinks so that accidents will be minimised, but insufficient fluids may lead to infections and smelly urine or constipation.

Clothes which are easily unfastened may help avoid accidents.

Track suit trousers or full skirts, and velcro fasteners rather than zips and buttons should be considered. Give assistance with removal of clothing if necessary. Change clothes when they are wet, and try not to let the person become accustomed to wet clothes.

Avoid constipation

Try to establish a regular routine for bowel motions - remembering this may not be every day, as individuals do vary. A warm drink at breakfast, then a visit to the toilet about 30 minutes later works for some. Ensure there is adequate fibre in the diet, i.e. fruit, bran and vegetables. Ensure also that the person drinks water and has regular exercise.



Make sure the toilet is comfortable and easy to use

It may be necessary to install bathroom and toilet aids - ask your doctor about this.

If the person is incontinent at night

Try cutting down on fluids for a few hours before bed time. However, make sure 5-8 glasses are drunk during the day. Encourage the person with dementia to use the toilet before going to bed. Make sure there is nothing lying in the pathway to the toilet. If necessary, try putting a commode or urinal beside the bed and/or leaving a night light on. Bedpans, commodes, urinals may be available on refundable deposit and a small weekly charge. Enquire at your local hospital or continence advisory service.

Diuretics

People on diuretics may experience increased urgency and incontinence after the medication is given. Any medication should be discussed with your doctor.

A change in continence may be caused by a bladder infection

Strong smelling urine or a slight fever may indicate this or the person becoming more muddled. Seek assistance from your doctor if this occurs.

Don't cope with an incontinence problem alone

Many carers try to cope alone, refusing to discuss the problem because they are embarrassed or afraid of humiliating the person with dementia, who may be aware of his or her incontinence.

If incontinence is already a problem, contact your local continence services on 0800 650 659 or www.continence.org.nz.

