

*Better
Together*

Patient information

Managing Continence And Confusion

Corporate Nursing Royal Liverpool Hospital Sites

PIF1562/V2

The way we stay continent is a very difficult function which allows us to delay passing urine or having our bowels opened until we are in the right place.

This skill is something which can be affected by memory problems. It may happen occasionally or, as the illness gets worse, more often. It is important to understand it may be due to a treatable condition, so needs assessing. You can discuss this with a Health Care Professional.

Treatable conditions include:

- Urinary tract infection – someone may complain of pain or burning when passing water or may appear in pain if they have difficulty talking. You or the person may notice their urine looks cloudy or smells. Sometimes an infection can be present without warning signs so it is always a good idea to ask your nurse or doctor to check all is well.
- Prostate gland trouble (in men) – your family doctor (GP) will be able to assess if this is a problem and give you information about treatment and help in managing leakage.
- The side effects of some medication – unfortunately some medications do affect how your bladder and bowel work. It is always a good idea to talk to your doctor if this could be the case and he or she may be able to change them or change the dose.

Please take advice before stopping or changing the time of taking any medicines.

- Severe constipation may cause urinary incontinence through pressure on the bladder and sometimes bowel leakage where loose, smelly motion leaks round the hard stool that is blocking the bowel. It is important that you talk about this with a healthcare professional to advise you how to improve this problem.
- Lack of recall – when people become forgetful this may also mean they slowly lose the memory of what to do in a toilet, or even where the toilet is. Advice can be given to help you manage in this situation.

It is very important to try to help this person keep their own continence skills for as long as possible.

How can you help?

Get to know the person's habits. This may be very private, but usually our bladder and bowel actions have some pattern to them. It may be useful to know when the person is most likely to use the toilet.

If a person finds it difficult to tell you when they need to use a toilet, you will need to become aware of other signs such as fidgeting, wandering or pulling at clothing and then suggest they use the toilet.

As their memory gets worse you can help them by reminding them to go to the toilet at times when you know they need the toilet.

Make sure they drink six to eight mugs of fluid during the day. People can forget to drink.

Using the toilet is a very complicated thing to do, involving lots of different steps to be successful.

Try to keep using the toilet to a few regular, easy steps. Always use the same words to ask or describe what is happening, and keep to the same routine inside the toilet.

Occupational Therapists can be helpful in breaking down this task.

Decide the toileting programme and tell others. This is important so that if the person spends time apart from you, the routine to use the toilet is the same.

Keep in contact with the health care professional who is helping you. Discussing and watching for any changes as they occur can help stop them from becoming larger problems.

What help is available?

The health care professional who is helping you may help to provide:

- Aids and equipment to make using the toilet easier.
- Advice about clothing so that the person can get quick access to themselves in the toilet – e.g. Velcro rather than zips or buttons.
- Advice about diet to keep bowels healthy.
- Advice about hygiene.
- Advice about mobility.
- Advice about special problems to help manage any wetness and to keep the person dignified, comfortable and dry.
- The time to listen to your worries, suggest other ideas and to work with you.

Further Information

The Bladder and Bowel Foundation

- Nurse Help-line 0845 345 0165
- Counsellor Help-line 0870 770 3246

www.bladderandbowelfoundation

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