

Urology Department

Continence in the confused elderly

Staying continent requires a very complex function that allows us to delay passing urine or opening our bowels until we are in the appropriate place.

This skill may be affected by a dementing illness and incontinence may:

- Be occasional
- It may occur as the illness progresses
- It may become more frequent

The incontinence may be treatable so it should be discussed with a Healthcare Professional

Treatable conditions include urinary infection – signs include:

- The person may complain of burning sensation when passing urine
- They may show expression of pain or have difficulty talking
- Urine may appear cloudy or smelly

Infection does not always show specific symptoms so ask a doctor or nurse to check

Medication – side effects of some medication can affect your bladder and bowel; discuss this with your doctor if this is causing any of the problems. Ask if any medication can be changed to relieve things

Never stop or change medication without taking advice from your GP or nurse



Patient Information

- Constipation may cause urinary incontinence – through pressure on the bladder
- Bowel leakage – loose, smelly motion can leak around a hard stool that is blocking the bowel

Discuss this with a healthcare professional for advice on how to improve the bowel

It is important to help a person maintain their own continence skills as long as possible.

When incontinence is due to lack of recall or if people are forgetful, they may gradually lose memory of what to do in the toilet, or where the toilet is, advice can be given to help manage this.

How can you help?

- Get to know the person's habits
- Bladder and bowel actions can have a pattern
- Note the most likely use of toilet
- Remind them to use the toilet when they are most likely to go
- Keep this as a regular routine

It would be helpful to put a clear sign or picture of a toilet on the door to remind the individual where the toilet is.

Offering the individual the use of a toilet at regular two-hourly intervals may help maintain continence.

If verbal communication is difficult, look for other signs which may prompt you to suggest they use the toilet:

- Fidgeting
- Wandering
- Pulling at clothes

Ensure they drink plenty to keep the bladder and bowel healthy; a GP or nurse can advise on this. Using the toilet can be complicated as it involves lots of steps to make it successful:

- Try to keep using the toilet to a few, regular, easy steps

Patient Information

- Use the same language when asking or describing what is happening
- Use the same routine inside the toilet

Decide a routine, keep to it, tell others – this is important when the person is not with you:

- Encourage the same routine so that the skills remain in place
- Keep contact with their healthcare professional who is helping you
- Discuss and monitor changes as they occur to prevent further problems

Other things to consider

- Aids, adaptations to ease toilet usage
- Seek advice on:
 - clothing, for example, Velcro not zips or buttons
 - diet for a healthy bowel
 - hygiene
 - mobility
 - special problems – to manage wetness or maintain dignity
- Discuss your concerns with your healthcare professional and ask them to work with you on suggestions.

Further Information

For further information, please contact the Urology Department

Telephone: 024 7696 5296

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