Dementia and incontinence: Causes, risk factors and management tips

Dementia is a progressive neurocognitive impairment in which as the illness peaks, the individual begins to lose the ability to react quickly to a sensation or a stimulus. Excretion is one of the most important biological systems of the body but as we grow older control over these activities is lost, which leads in unintentional excretion, this is known as incontinence, and it can be urinary or fecal incontinence depending on whether its unintentional release of urine or bowel movement. Research discovered that about 60-70 percent of population which suffers from dementia experiences one or the other kind of incontinence, hence making it one of the most commonly experienced symptom of dementia.

***What are the Causes?***

As we are aware of the fact that dementia is progressive illness, so when it reaches the advanced stages of the illness, the response to stimulus behavior of the individual is delayed resulting in delayed actions for a sensation. Other causes why an individual with dementia can experience fecal or urinary incontinence are:

* Inability to identify which room is bathroom.
* The individual is unable to communicate the need to use the bathroom.
* Inability to reach the bathroom in time.
* The individual is unable to move on his/her own or has immobility.
* Medical conditions like enlarged prostate, constipation, neurological complications caused by stroke, Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, prostate cancer, side effects of medicines that relax muscles of the bladder and reduce awareness, such as sleeping pills and tranquilizers, and urinary tract infections.

***What are the risk factors?***

There are factors that can increase the chances of incontinence in individuals with dementia, these factors are known as risk factors. Below are some of these factors you can keep in mind:

* Certain medications can induce incontinence in individuals with dementia.
* Menopause in women which affects the urinary bladder.
* Enlarged prostate or prostate surgery in men.
* Age is one of the most prominent risk factor as the bladder gets weaker with age.
* Psychological trauma which affect the nerves for response to stimulus.
* Being overweight can put tremendous pressure on the bladder.

***Management tips for caregivers***

* If medications are the cause or risk factor of incontinence, consult the doctor regarding the side effects and what measures could be taken.
* To help maintain a healthy bladder in patients with dementia is to make sure they avoid caffeine, liquids before bed, spicy food, consume plenty of fiber to avoid constipation, and regular exercise.
* Pads, adult pull-up pants, or liners but make sure to wash their skin regularly as constant exposure to moisture can increase the bacterial build up.
* To reduce incontinence accidents at home make sure the path to the bathroom is obstacle free, well lit, close to their bed or sitting place, so they can reach the bathroom quickly.
* One thing to keep in mind if your loved ones experience incontinence is to be respectful of their privacy, speak or address the issue in a calm tone and respectful manner, and always avoid scolding or being disrespectful to the person.