

Incontinence

Incontinence is defined as a partial or total loss of control over bladder or bowel function that results in wetting or soiling oneself. Many things can cause incontinence, including medications, food or drink, infections, or other medical problems. It is a good idea to tell a doctor about any new incontinence to see if treatment is available. Dementia can also cause incontinence. The table below shows how symptoms of dementia can lead to incontinence and strategies to help caregivers manage each symptom. At the end of this handout, you will find pictures of a variety of products that can help with continence care needs.

Symptom	Result	Strategy
Apathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of interest in going to the bathroom • Inability to notice or care if clothes get wet or soiled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a routine toileting schedule • Provide respectful reminders and cues as needed • Use pads or pull-up briefs for occasional accidents
Forgetfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetting to go to the bathroom • Forgetting how to go to the bathroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a routine toileting schedule • Provide respectful reminders and cues as needed • Use pads or pull-up briefs for occasional accidents
Visual problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty finding the bathroom • Going to the bathroom in the wrong place (e.g., trashcan, houseplant, sink) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the pathway to bathroom is clear of clutter • Keep a light on in the bathroom or use motion sensor nightlights • Place a picture or sign on the door to the bathroom • Use a colored toilet seat
Inattention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting distracted on their way to the bathroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the person to do one thing at a time
Mobility problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty getting to the bathroom in time • Difficulty getting on and off the toilet • Trouble with zippers and belts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a routine toileting schedule • Give the person enough time to get to the toilet • Ask a doctor for a referral to an occupational therapist • Try using a commode, grab bars, raised toilet seat, or urinal • Use pants that are easy to remove (e.g., those with an elastic waist or Velcro fly)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use pull-up briefs if the person can walk to the toilet • Use tabbed briefs if the person is unable to walk to the toilet
Sensory problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing the feeling of having to go to the bathroom • Inability to control bladder or bowel function • Losing the ability to feel when clothes are wet or soiled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a routine toileting schedule • Inspect the skin for redness, irritation, or open sores • Use protective skin products
Nighttime incontinence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going to the bathroom many times during the night • Wetting the bed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit fluid intake in the evening • Avoid caffeinated and alcoholic beverages • Use the bathroom before going to bed • Use a urinal or bedside commode • Use a waterproof mattress cover, absorbent underpads, and super absorbent briefs • Consider using a hospital bed to help protect the caregiver's back during care
Embarrassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusing or denying the need for help • Getting angry or frustrated • Hiding soiled clothing • Avoiding public places or social events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a respectful, matter-of-fact approach to offer help (do not use baby talk) • Only offer as much help as the person needs • Avoid reacting negatively to accidents • Try distracting the person with pleasant conversation, music, or something to hold
Skin problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red, irritated skin • Open sores • Pressure sores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the person stay clean and dry; use absorbent pull-ups or briefs and help change them regularly • Use no-rinse cleansing lotions, foams, creams, or wipes (i.e., Tena, Coloplast, Medline Remedy, Convatec Aloe Vesta, or Comfort Shield brands)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people prefer to use a bidet • Apply barrier ointment to the groin area • For skin that is already tender, red, and irritated, use an ointment that includes zinc and menthol; zinc helps with healing and menthol soothes skin (i.e., Calmoseptine, Desitin, Lantiseptic, Medline Remedy, or Coloplast brands) • See a doctor if skin appears purplish, as this may be a sign of fungal infection or deep tissue damage
Pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty getting to the bathroom in time • Avoiding going to the bathroom • Refusing or resisting help • Grimacing, moaning, or bracing during incontinence care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell a doctor about signs of pain during incontinence care • Try using a raised toilet seat or commode • Be careful, slow, and gentle when providing incontinence care • Tell the person what you are going to do before you do it

Dealing with incontinence is often stressful for people with dementia and their families. The person with dementia may feel embarrassed and ashamed about needing help. An adult child may feel uncomfortable helping their older parent with such an intimate task. A spouse or partner may feel sad or angry watching their loved one lose control over a basic function. It is normal to feel this kind of grief. With time, people often get used to these changes. They may even find it is not as bad as they thought it would be.

Incontinence care can be tiring and painful for caregivers. Using a commode or hospital bed can help prevent injury. No-rinse soap can make it easier to keep the person clean. Families often need respite by this stage and may hire paid caregivers to help in the home. In some areas, the person with dementia may go to an adult day center where they can participate in activities and get help with incontinence care. Sometimes, the person with dementia needs more help than families can provide at home, and the best option is for the person to move into a long-term care facility.

Continence Care Products

Here are some examples of products that can be helpful for addressing common problems in continence care. Clicking on product names will direct you to an example of the product sold through an online retailer; similar products may also be available at major retailers (e.g. WalMart, Target, Walgreens, CVS, Home Depot, Lowe's) near you. This tool is intended to help identify a range of potential solutions; however, it is not an exhaustive list of all the technology and supplies available. The Care Ecosystem does not endorse any particular product.

Clothing and Underwear

[Pads](#)



[Liners](#)



[Male Guards](#)



[Disposable briefs \(pull-up style\)](#)



[Disposable briefs \(tab style\)](#)



[Absorbent underwear](#)



[Easy-to-remove pants \(e.g. with elastic waistband and velcro fly\)](#)



Visuospatial Cues

[Colored toilet seat](#)



[Night lights](#)



[Bathroom door sign](#)



Supplies

[Washable absorbent underpads](#)



[No-rinse cleansing cream](#)



[Barrier ointment](#)



[Urinal](#)



Equipment

[Bedside commode](#)



[Grab bars](#)



[Raised toilet seat \(with handles\)](#)



[Bidet toilet seat](#)



Additional Resources:

1. <http://www.nationalincontinence.com/>
2. <https://www.enablenvironments.com.au/downloads.html>

Videos about how to help with incontinence care:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DvYE12CM0c&feature=plcp%20Toileting/Incontinence>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oB0uPoulcXo>