

Caring for Incontinent People – Carers Tips and Hints

Caring for an incontinent person can be challenging. Here are some helpful tips and hints to assist.

Simplify the Situation

Choose two-piece clothing outfits that are easy to put on and take off. For a woman, wide skirts can be easily lifted while sitting on the toilet. For a man, replace difficult buttons and zippers with velcro fasteners or buy pants with a drawstring waist. Specially made clothing for people who are disabled or have impaired mobility are often available at home health care stores.

Design a safe and easy path to the toilet. Move furniture out of the way and remove area rugs that may be a safety hazard. Stairways or cluttered paths can also make it difficult for some people to reach the toilet in time.

Make the bathroom easy to find. Put nightlights in the hallway and bedroom or leave the bathroom light on during the night. If the person you are caring for is confused, try placing brightly coloured arrows on the walls to point the way. You could also place strips of glow-in-the-dark tape on the floor marking the path to the bathroom.

Straining to get in or out of a chair or bed may put pressure on the bladder. To reduce the strain, a person's feet should touch the floor while sitting on the chair or the edge of the bed. Chairs with sturdy arms above and on either side of the seat can help provide leverage to get in and out more easily. Rocking chairs should also be avoided if the person you care for has difficulty getting out of them. Automatic lift chairs are available that help raise a person from a sitting to a standing position with minimal effort.

Consider having a man sit down on the toilet to urinate. You will curb accidents that occur due to an inaccurate aim.

Provide time and privacy in the bathroom so the person you are caring for feels comfortable enough to completely empty the bladder.

Remove wet clothing immediately after an accident. To cut down on urine odour, rinse soiled items immediately. If you cannot rinse fabrics promptly, make sure to store them in an airtight container or plastic bag with a room deodoriser placed inside.

Encourage Their Participation

Often, people have incontinence episodes simply because they have difficulty getting to the toilet in time. Getting the person you care for to begin a simple walking exercise program may increase their mobility. If necessary, encourage them to use adaptive equipment like a cane, walker or wheelchair. Whether they begin a walking exercise program or not, consider placing a bedpan or commode close to their bed or chair.

Plan regular trips to the toilet. Gradually increase the interval between trips over several weeks. Make it a goal to go every two hours - about how long it takes the bladder to fill with one cup of urine.

Use the Right Tools for the Job

If accidents are happening near the toilet, it could be because the person is having difficulty sitting down on the toilet. A toilet seat extender that raises the seat height to a more comfortable level may be added. The extender may be combined with wall handrails to make things easier.

Consider using an absorbent product to avoid accidents, and especially at night so you can get some much-needed rest. Use absorbent products that match your needs and preferences as well as those of the person you care for. Your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or other caregivers may have recommendations that can help you decide. Specific information on Depend® products is available in the Product Section of this Internet site. Product selection should be made based on level of absorbency, product type, size and fit.

Place a discreet container with an airtight lid in the bathroom for disposal of absorbent products. You can find this type of container in a pharmacy, discount variety store or home medical equipment store.

In case of an accident on furniture or carpeting, special sprays are available to remove odours from fabrics. Check the laundry detergent aisle of your local grocery store or discount variety store.

Use a wet-proof mattress cover to keep the mattress from becoming soiled.

When planning a trip out, pack wet wipes, a change of clothes, a plastic bag and extra absorbent products. You'll be prepared in case of an accident.

Observe and Ask Questions

If the doctor has prescribed diuretics, discuss with them when they should be administered. Make sure they help the condition for which they are indicated - but also do not increase incontinence episodes, especially at night.

If the person you are caring for can't or won't communicate with you, observe behaviors that indicate urination is about to happen.

When in unfamiliar surroundings, scout out the nearest available toilet. To help, print out the National Public Toilet Map.

The Importance of Healthy Skin

Urine is irritating to the skin and can quickly damage it and the tissues underneath. The result may be redness, a rash or sores. These sores are called "bedsores", "pressure sores", or "skin ulcers" and are much, much easier to prevent than cure. If you notice redness or sores on the skin, seek immediate medical attention.

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Once a sore is established it can produce a discharge, which may contain pus, become foul smelling, or even turn black indicating a serious infection or tissue death. Sores can quickly become serious, reaching down into muscles, tendons and the bone. At worst, surgery is needed to repair the affected area. It can take months for new tissue to grow and a deep sore to heal.

Skincare Tips

You can fight skin problems due to incontinence by following these tips:

- Examine the skin on a daily basis for signs of skin break down.
- Call your doctor or health care provider if the skin appears to be pink, bright red, burned, irritated or chafed. Often, if caught early, the treatment can be simple and quite effective. In women, a vaginal infection could be producing irritating secretions.
- Change absorbent products as soon as they become wet to keep the skin as dry as possible.
- Wipe skin with a mild, non-irritating soap and rinse with warm water every time you change an absorbent product. Another option is a no-rinse perineal wash. Perineal washes are convenient, save time and work well to remove urine without discomfort. In addition, they are gentler to the skin than bar soap.
- After rinsing, air dry or gently pat skin dry using a soft cloth. Apply a thin layer of moisture barrier ointment according to package directions. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend an effective ointment.
- A regular bathing routine is also helpful to assure delicate skin is clean and free from irritants.
- Avoid using powder. It traps moisture in skin folds.
- If the person you are caring for is confined to bed, turning them frequently helps avoid pressure sores caused from lying on one spot too long.
- Keep bedding clean, dry and free of wrinkles. Wrinkled sheets may cause skin friction and irritation.
- Use soft, padded mattresses or chairs. Consider using an egg-crate mattress to further cushion the bed. A softer surface spreads weight over a larger skin area and reduces pressure directly under the bones.
- If incontinence episodes occur in bed, protect the mattress with Depend® Bed Protector. Remember to keep the sheets as wrinkle-free as possible. Some people prefer sheets made of cotton and cotton blends that feel similar to a t-shirt.
- If using an absorbent product, make sure it is not too tight or rubbing against the skin and irritating it. If you have any questions about applying Depend® absorbent products, see the Product Application Instructions for step-by-step directions and illustrations.