



# Incontinence



Issues related to incontinence can be especially difficult to address when caring for a person with dementia. Following the recommendations below can help you manage the situation.

## Identify patterns:

### Start a bowel and bladder diary

- Track bowel and bladder activity in order to get a feel for the person's toileting patterns.
- Look for subtle changes in facial expression and posture to detect non-verbal cues for needing the rest room.
- The goal is to anticipate needs and provide the person you care for with direct supervision and guidance when it is needed.
- If caregiver hours are flexible, try focusing those hours around the times in which incontinence issues tend to arise.

## Address obstacles:

### Make getting to the bathroom as easy as possible

- Can the person you care for find the bathroom on their own? Is it well lit? Would it help to hang a picture of a toilet outside the bathroom door?
- Consider using a commode in the living room, bedroom or other rooms in which your elder spends time during the day.
- Casually encourage the person to use the bathroom, in as natural a way as possible:
  - Conveniently pass by the restroom on your way to/from another activity, and suggest that they "make a quick stop."
  - *Important! Use a phrase that the person you care for would use themselves.*
  - It might help to provide a social cue such as saying, "I need to use the restroom quickly before we leave."
- If your elder confuses other areas of the home for the rest room:
  - Make the restroom or toilet stand out in some way—try to see things from their perspective.
  - Consider changing the toilet seat to a different color.
  - Place a plant or other item in the sink to show that it is not the toilet.
  - Observe and address the situation by adapting the environment instead of verbally explaining with logic or reason.

## Adapt:

- If necessary, try replacing the underwear in their drawer with disposable briefs/pull-ups.
- If the problem persists, line the furniture with plastic or chux to protect from damage.
- Regularly disinfect surfaces and wash hands.

## Seek advice:

### Assess underlying reasons for incontinence with the person's doctor

- Be sure to also address acute issues such as urinary frequency, UTIs, diarrhea, etc.
- Always remember that you have the Seniors At Home team to support you—just ask!

**To schedule a dementia care consultation email [dementiacare@jfcs.org](mailto:dementiacare@jfcs.org) or call 415-449-3712**

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