

A Guide to

CONTINENCE CARE FOR FAMILY CARERS



RESTROOM

WHAT IS INCONTINENCE?

A person is incontinent when they have no or reduced control of urine or faeces excreting from the bladder or bowel. Incontinence can be very difficult to cope with, both for the person experiencing it, and for you the family carer. This leaflet will tell you more about incontinence and give you some helpful tips and advice.



1 WHAT CAUSES INCONTINENCE?

There are many reasons why a person may be incontinent. The person you care for may have been incontinent since they were a child, or it may have developed due to a medical condition such as dementia, diabetes, a stroke or it may be associated with age related changes in the body.

2 GETTING A DIAGNOSIS

If you are caring for someone with incontinence, make sure they have visited the doctor to find out exactly why this is happening. This is important to ensure the condition is being managed as effectively as possible. In some instances the condition might be reversible if it is caused by infection, medication or food allergies. It may be possible to treat the incontinence through medication or surgery and the GP will advise or refer to a specialist service if appropriate.



3 TYPES OF INCONTINENCE

- **Stress urinary incontinence** – when small amounts of urine leaks during activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, walking or lifting.
- **Urge incontinence** - when urine leaks as you feel a sudden intense urge to urinate.
- **Urinary overflow incontinence** - the accidental or involuntary release of urine when the bladder becomes overly full, even though the person feels no urge to urinate. It is often due to a weak bladder muscle or a blockage.
- **Faecal overflow incontinence** – leakage of liquid stools around impacted faeces. This type of incontinence occurs when a person has had prolonged constipation, leading to stools becoming hard and dry and accumulating in the lower part of the colon.
- **Faecal incontinence** – having little or no control over the bowel.
- **Functional incontinence** – when the person's bladder and/or bowel is working normally but they are unable to access the toilet. This may be due to a physical or a cognitive condition.
- **Total incontinence** – when the bladder cannot store any urine and urine is leaking all the time.

4 TIPS FOR PROMOTING CONTINENCE

- One way to promote continence is to encourage the person to use the toilet if at all possible. To support this, ensure the toilet is visible and easily accessible. Avoid tight fitting clothes and ensure clothing can be easily/quickly removed. It may be that making a urinal or commode available will help the person remain continent for longer.
- You may want to encourage the person to visit the toilet every two hours as part of a bladder re-training programme. Consider keeping a diary of bowel and bladder activity and then try to encourage the person to use the bathroom a few minutes before they usually have this activity.
- Make sure the person you care for is drinking 6 glasses of fluids per day (water, tea, milk, juice). If a person is living with urinary incontinence they may be inclined to reduce the amount of liquid they drink. It is important that the person does not become dehydrated as the increased acidity of the urine irritates the lining of the bladder and can aggravate urinary incontinence. Signs of dehydration include urinating less frequently (fewer than 4 times per day), and/or producing small amounts of urine that is dark yellow and strong smelling.
- Constipation can cause or aggravate some types of incontinence. Make sure the person you care for has enough fibre and fluids in their diet. If the person you care for is constipated for more than 5 days, get this checked with the GP so it can be resolved. For further information on dehydration and constipation please see Family Carers Ireland's "Guide to Good Nutrition for Family Carers".
- Avoid or cut down on caffeine (in coffee, fizzy drinks, green tea etc) and alcohol as these can greatly irritate the lining of the bladder, making urinary incontinence worse. These stimulants can also increase frequency of bowel movements.
- Reduce consumption of acidic food such as lemons, limes, oranges, grapefruits, tangerines. etc and spicy food as this can overstimulate the bowel and irritate the bladder.
- Consult with a physiotherapist to learn exercises to help strengthen and rehabilitate the pelvic floor muscles.
- If the person has bloating, cramps, bowel urgency or faecal leaks, keep a food diary to see if there are particular foods that irritate the condition. Consult with a dietitian to build a healthy diet that eliminates identified aggravating foods.

5 TIPS FOR SUPPORTING A PERSON WHO IS INCONTINENT

Think about the dignity of the person you are caring for and ensure they have privacy and are treated with respect by all engaged in supporting their continence.

Keep the products near the person you care for, so that changing them is faster and easier for you.

Where the skin is in contact with urine and faeces, it becomes irritated, sore and painful. Sometimes pressure sores may develop. To prevent this:

- Support the person to change their position regularly. If you need lifting and handling training, please contact Family Carers Ireland and we can arrange this for you.
- Keep pressure off of bony parts of the body by using cushions/pillows.
- Clean up urine or faeces as soon as possible after the leakage.
- Wash the area at least once each day with gentle soap and warm water. Rinse and pat the skin dry or, if appropriate allow the air to dry the skin.
- Don't use antibacterial soaps, perfumed products or talc as they may aggravate the skin and can lead to the skin retaining moisture.
- You may wish to use an emulsifying ointment or zinc and castor oil ointment to protect and hydrate the skin.
- Consider using a gentle product to eliminate odours.

PRODUCTS AVAILABLE

Different styles of incontinence aids are available with different levels of absorbency to suit the type of incontinence and situation of the person. For example, if a person is mobile and active and experiences stress incontinence, then a light pad may suffice. Where a person has limited mobility it may be better to have a larger pad with sticky adhesive on the side to reduce the likelihood that the pad will leak. Pads usually have a hydrophobic layer to draw the urine away from the skin. Before using pads, discuss with the GP, Public Health Nurse or Continence Nurse.

It is also possible to get an incontinence sheet for the bed and washable beds pads. A mattress protector is useful to keep the mattress clean and dry.



CATHETERS

The person you care for may have a urinary catheter. A catheter is a tube placed in the body to drain and collect urine from the bladder. These can be used when a person is unable to physically get to the bathroom or when the person's bladder does not empty independently. Consider using a catheter strap to secure the tube to the leg, thereby reducing pulling and discomfort. Sometimes a Flip-Flo catheter valve can be used, eliminating the need for a catheter bag. This is a tap like device which fits into the end of the catheter. With the valve closed, your bladder continues to store urine. The bladder must be emptied every two hours by releasing the Flip-Flo.

Catheters can be a source of infection so do tell the GP if you or the person you care for notices:

- Pain, burning or other discomfort at the site of insertion, in the back or around the abdomen
- Raised temperature
- Cloudy urine
- Fatigue
- Blood in urine
- A strong smell

6 SELF CARE

Supporting continence can be stressful, and if you need further support or advice, please don't hesitate to contact Family Carers Ireland. It's important that your needs as a family carer are met and we're here to help you. Family Carers Ireland has a range of practical supports in place including education, training, respite, counselling, advocacy, we also offer full wellbeing reviews for family carers, advice around rights and entitlements and peer support groups. No one should have to care alone.

ABOUT US

Family Carers Ireland

is the national charity dedicated to supporting the

355,000+ FAMILY CARERS

across Ireland who dedicate their lives to caring for their loved ones, including children and adults with physical or intellectual disability, frail older people, those with palliative care needs and people living with chronic illness or addiction and mental health issues.



If you have been affected by the content in this leaflet, please call our FREEPHONE Careline on 1800 24 07 24.

To find out more about Family Carers Ireland, please visit www.familycarers.ie.



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