

Care Partner Information

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Caregiving Tips

Losing Control of Urine

Losing control of urine is called incontinence (in-con-tin-ents). It is common when people have dementia. It often gets worse as dementia gets worse.

Sometimes people with dementia wet their pants and feel bad about it. You need to help them stay dry so they feel better about themselves. Later, when dementia is worse, they may wet their pants and not even know they did. It is still important help them stay dry to prevent sores on the skin. If you can help them control urine, it will be easier to take care of them.

Losing Control of Urine Can Sometimes be Fixed

If losing urine is a new problem, make a doctor's appointment for a check up. Sometimes there are causes that can be fixed or helped.

Some Causes of Losing Urine that Can Sometimes be Fixed		
Urinary tract infection	Drinking too much caffeine	Diabetes out of control
Medicine side effects	Severe constipation	Large prostate gland

Why Do People with Dementia Lose Control of Urine?

People with dementia often don't know until the last minute that they need to use the bathroom. Then, when they suddenly have to go, they can't get to the bathroom quickly enough or they can't find the bathroom.

Sometimes they can find the bathroom but have trouble pulling down their pants. Other times they don't even realize they have to use the bathroom and just wet their pants.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and promotoras care for someone with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. The information in the series offers general advice and does not distinguish between the different types of dementia.

You May Be Able to Help

The table below lists some things you can try to help prevent someone from losing urine. Give them a try and see how they work. Also, don't be afraid to let the person drink as much liquid as they want during the day. Only limit liquids after dinner before bed.

What To Do If the Person Can't Get To The Bathroom On Time

- Keep a clear path to the bathroom with nothing in the way.
- Be sure hallway is well lit.
- Put up signs in the hall that point to the bathroom.
- Provide clothes that are easy to remove.

What To Do If the Person Doesn't Even Try To Get To The Bathroom

Try asking about the bathroom

- Every 2 hours, ask them if they need to go to the bathroom.
- If they say yes, bring them to the bathroom and help them.
- If they say no, come back and ask again in a few minutes, and then again in 1 or 2 hours.

If that doesn't work, try bringing them to the bathroom

- Bring them to the bathroom every 2-3 hours.
- If they are already wet when you bring them to the bathroom, next time bring them sooner than 2-3 hours.
- Use shorter and shorter intervals till you get them to the bathroom before they are wet.

It is important to avoid having someone sit in wet pants or lay in a wet bed. It can cause sores on the skin. So, if you can't control losing urine with the suggestions above, here's the next step.

For clothes. Consider using "adult briefs." They are special underpants for people who leak urine. They have special pads inside. You can throw away the pads when they are wet.

For the bed. Place a rubber /plastic pad and an absorbent pad on the bed, and cover it with a folded sheet. If the person wets the bed, you can just change the folded sheet and the pads.

Useful Websites

- Basic information about losing urine: www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-incontinence.asp
- Suggestions for dealing with losing urine: www.alznyc.org/caregivers/incontinence.asp
- How to ask about bathroom visits (prompted voiding): www.geronet.med.ucla.edu/centers/borun/modules/Mobility_decline_prevention/mdformspvprocedure.pdf

Written By: Barry D. Weiss, MD, University of Arizona College of Medicine

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Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging,
Alzheimer's Association - Desert Southwest Chapter and Community Caregivers