

TOILETING

A continence program (self-control in toileting) is vitally important in helping elders maintain a sense of dignity, be comfortable in social settings, as well as in preventing problems of skin breakdowns. A solid continence program also results in less work for everyone. If an elder has a plan for staying dry, they need less care and have less laundry.

Before beginning a continence plan, it can be helpful to try to determine all the things that are contributing to the problem. That will help you in understanding what it will take to be successful. Some considerations include:

Medications

Inability to shut off a stream of urine so that it is continual

Clothing that is too difficult to manage

Not being able to get to the bathroom on their own

Inability to tell someone that they need to go

Confusion over what to do and where to go if they have the urge

Making a statement by urinating in an inappropriate place as a way of protesting.

- **BEGIN WITH TRYING TO DETERMINE WHY THE ELDER IS EXPERIENCING INCONTINENCE SO THAT YOUR PLAN ADDRESSES THE ISSUES:**
 - Possibly medications can be changed;
 - They can learn to have better control (Kegel exercises)
 - They need clothing that is easier to manage on the toilet
 - They need to be taken to the bathroom on an appropriate schedule because they cannot get there on their own

- They need a better method to let caregivers know they need to go
- They need more practice in regularly finding their bathroom
- There is a deeper issue that they are upset over that needs to be solved.

KEYS TO CONTINENCE

- **THE KEY TO A CONTINENCE PROGRAM IF AN ELDER CANNOT TELL CAREGIVERS THEY NEED TO GO IS TO DETERMINE THE PATTERN OF VOIDING FOR THE ELDER;**
- **THEN HELP THEM GET TO THE TOILET PRIOR TO HAVING AN ACCIDENT OR VOIDING IN THEIR UNDERGARMENTS.**
- **YOU CANNOT DO AN EFFECTIVE PLAN WITHOUT KEEPING VERY CAREFUL RECORDS AS TO WHEN THE ELDER LAST TOILETED AND WHETHER THE ELDER'S UNDERGARMENTS WERE WET OR DRY AT THE TIME.**
- **YOUR STRATEGY IS TO TOILET THEM MORE FREQUENTLY UNTIL YOU DETERMINE HOW OFTEN THEY HAVE TO BE TOILETED TO STAY DRY.**
- **WORK WITH THE ELDER SO THAT THEY HAVE TIME TO VOID WHEN THEY DO SIT ON THE TOILET.**

STRATEGIES

- If the elder is capable of informing caregivers of the need to use the commode, provide the support and assistance needed;
- If the elder is unable to determine when it is time to void, assist the elder first thing in the morning, every two hours, and 30 minutes following each meal;
- Assist the elder by first explaining, simply, what you are going to do and how they are going to participate in the process;
- Assist the elder with a safe transfer to the toilet, using the grab bars and/or commode rails;
- Encourage the elder to assist in removing lower body clothing. Start the task and encourage them to help while holding the rails with one hand, if capable;
- Allow the elder privacy to void if they are safe to be left out of direct site;
- Ask them if they are finished. Do not rush them if you believe they are in the process of going;
- Encourage them to complete as much of their hygiene as possible;
- Be sure they are wiping front to back, or if assisting them that wiping is front to back. Back to front can lead to bacteria that contribute to urinary tract infections;
- Provide cues to push from hand rails to stand, hold with one hand (if they are able to release one hand from the rails) and assist with pulling their pants up, as much as they can;
- Assist with wheel chair or other assistive device positioning for hand washing.