

Tips for Caregivers

Clean thoroughly. Difficulty cleaning after using the toilet can lead to conditions such as urinary tract infections. Offer help but encourage your loved one to do as much as possible.

Keep dry. Wet skin can cause irritation, infection, and bed sores. Incontinence products can keep your loved one and the furniture dry. Use wipes for delicate skin or an inexpensive plastic bottle called a “portable bidet.” No-rinse bath mitts help with fecal incontinence.

Choose simple clothing. Some people have trouble with belts, zippers, or removing underpants. Try switching to pants that are easy to pull down. For women, a washable dress or skirt may reduce accidents and simplify clean-up.

Stay calm. People react to incontinence differently. Some insist they did not lose control and someone else caused the mess. Don’t argue or blame. Offer help and gently encourage a fresh change of clothes.

Track episodes to help identify patterns. Does fecal incontinence occur the day after eating ice cream? Is urinary incontinence more common at a certain time of day? Does caffeine make matters worse?

Get help. Dealing with incontinence issues can be overwhelming. Take self-care breaks when you can. Find in-home help. Join a support group—group members will understand and may have helpful tips.

WE CARE

We hope that these tips are useful as you strive to provide the care that your loved one needs. Please know that the staff at Care2Caregivers is available to discuss these issues and help you get connected with programs that support your health and well-being. Our dedicated, professional staff members have also been family caregivers, and they are here to listen.



WHEN YOU CARE • WE ARE THERE

For more information:

Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA) has been providing compassionate and sensitive mental health care to older adults since 1975. A team of Geriatric Psychiatrists, Social Workers and Case Managers are available to assist families with diagnosis and treatment. COPSA also provides training for professionals, family caregivers and the community on issues related to aging, memory and mental health.

Care2Caregivers provides resources, referrals, information and supportive counseling to anyone caring for someone with memory loss. Call for help.

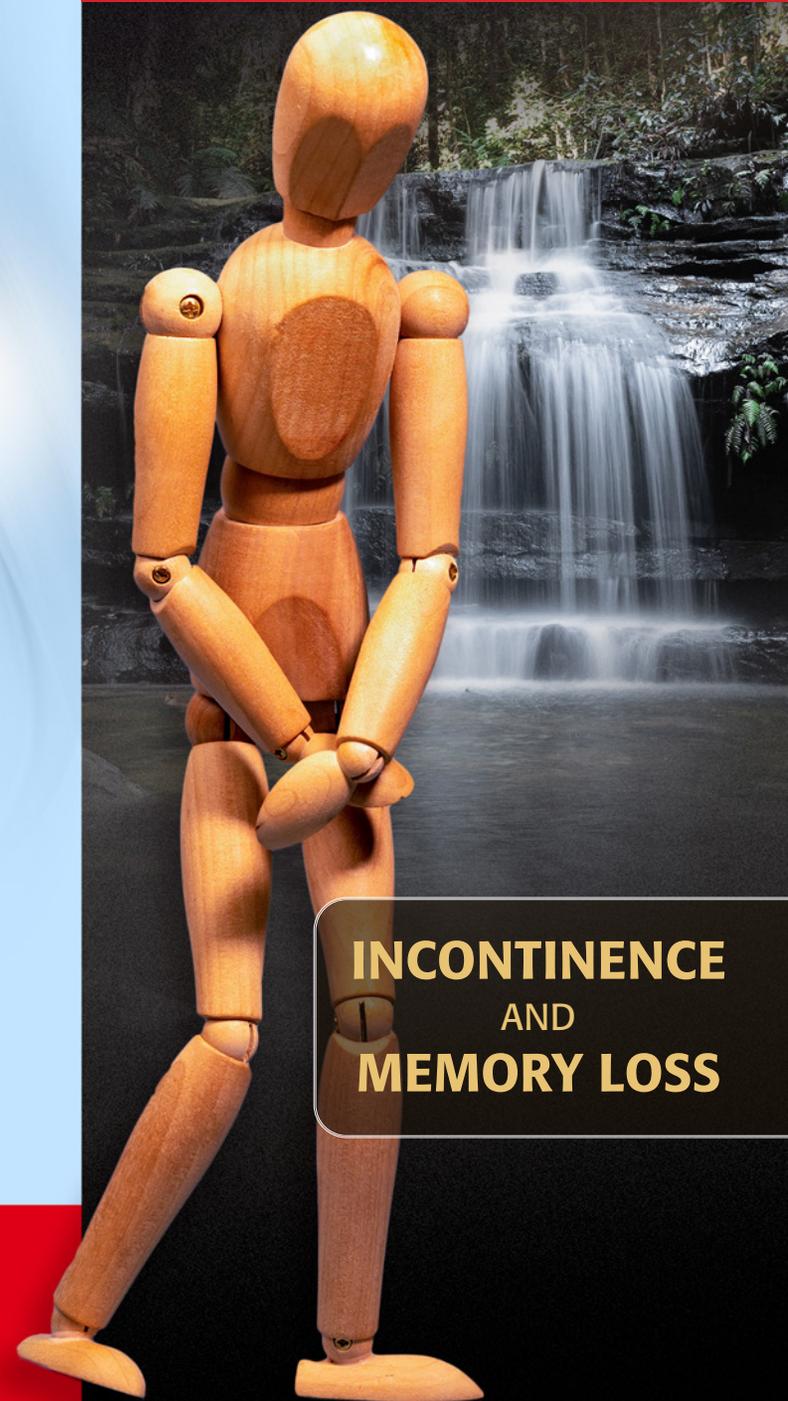
HELPLINE: 800.424.2494
www.Care2Caregivers.com

RUTGERS HEALTH

University Behavioral Health Care
COPSA Institute for Alzheimer’s Disease & Related Disorders

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**INCONTINENCE
AND
MEMORY LOSS**

Tips for dealing with incontinence

Incontinence is a common problem for people with memory loss. It is distressing for them and for their caregivers. Incontinence means an involuntary (unintended) leakage of urine and/or feces. Experts estimate that urinary incontinence occurs in at least one-third of people with memory loss who live at home. Fecal (bowel) incontinence is not as common, possibly affecting as many as 15% of older adults.

What causes incontinence?

Certain physical conditions can cause incontinence. A **urinary tract infection** can cause urinary incontinence. Some **foods or medications** can cause diarrhea. As we age, **organs such as the bladder, uterus, and prostate change in ways that can reduce control of our bladder and bowels.** A doctor can evaluate whether physical issues are contributing to incontinence.

Memory loss from Alzheimer's Disease, or another related neurocognitive disorder, **can disrupt the brain's signals to the bladder or bowels.** People may have trouble recognizing or expressing the need to use the toilet. Over time, people may be unable to successfully and independently get to and use the toilet. They may have accidents when not making it to the toilet in time. They may have difficulty with the steps of toileting (properly pulling down all of their clothes, cleaning effectively, and

washing hands thoroughly). Some people may urinate in the wrong place (a garbage can or a potted plant on the floor). These challenges result from brain changes.

Is there a treatment?

In spite of incontinence being common, many people never report this to their healthcare team. Providers may not ask about incontinence. Feelings of shame and hopelessness can make it hard to bring it up on your own. Remember, you can't get help if you don't let someone know the problem!

If diagnosed properly, some causes are easily treated, such as a urinary tract infection. Some medications can be prescribed for urinary incontinence, but these may cause complications for people with memory loss, so check with the doctor or pharmacist. If your loved one needs medications for diarrhea or constipation, get very clear instructions about when and how to use them, since treatment for one can cause the other. **Even though treatments are limited, there are things you can do to prevent or manage incontinence.**

Prevention tips

Dehydration is a common with older adults, especially those with memory loss. This can lead to an increase in urinary tract infections, causing urinary incontinence as well as confusion and other disturbing changes. People with memory loss may not notice they feel thirsty. Like many older adults, they may refuse liquids so they don't have to keep running to the bathroom. It's best to have plenty to drink during the day but limit fluids in the evening to help reduce nighttime incontinence.



Stay hydrated. *Water, soups, popsicles, and smoothies are good ways to keep up fluids.*

Getting plenty of fluid also helps keep the bowels working well. If you can avoid constipation, you can avoid medications that can cause diarrhea. Check with a healthcare provider about the best diet for your loved one.

Keeping a regular toileting schedule can be key to preventing incontinence. Inviting your loved one to go the bathroom every two hours gives them lots of opportunities to void in the right place. Remember, no one wants to have an accident! Be tactful, be discreet. It can be very difficult to accept help with these very personal tasks. Think about how you would want someone to assist you if this happened to you.

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