

The Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington's Caregiver Corner

Living With Incontinence

A symptom such as incontinence truly requires a caregiver's patience and loving heart. It can be one of the most sensitive issues a loved one can experience. However, there are ways to manage incontinence, so quality of life is not compromised.

Emotions

Conquering the fear and embarrassment a loved one feels because of incontinence is one of a caregiver's main challenges. The fear of being wet and then being discovered, especially in public, is emotionally straining. Many people with incontinence may refuse to leave their homes in order to be close to a bathroom. This behavior really leads to unnecessary isolation and robs a loved one of time with friends and family.

The first step is for a caregiver to recognize that incontinence may be the reason their loved one is hiding out. Many people do not realize the extent that incontinence is affecting their lives. A caregiver may be able to notice it first and help their loved one address the issue.

Professional therapists suggest that a person living with incontinence should make it a point to do something they usually would every day and complete the task or outing as normal. Whether going to lunch with friends or visiting family, being a part of daily life while learning to manage incontinence will boost a loved one's self-esteem and confidence.

Products

There are a variety of products on the market that can help achieve this goal: maintaining quality of life with incontinence.

A caregiver should always give their loved one a choice. Many products are available and picking just one, expecting someone else to like it, may result in greater conflicts than resolutions. Look for free samples, as many companies will offer them.

First, a person may want to try disposable protective underwear. They work best for mild to moderate incontinence, pull off and on like regular underwear, and have a cloth-like outer layer for comfort.

Disposable adult diapers are designed for moderate to heavy incontinence and are available in a variety of fit, absorbency and capacity.

Disposable pads also come in many shapes and sizes, for men and women. This product line also works best for mild to moderate incontinence.

Regardless of product, a loved one and caregiver must decide together which product provides adequate protection and the best level of comfort.

Day vs. Night

The hour of the day makes a difference for someone suffering with incontinence. Coughing, sneezing, laughing and exercising all contribute to stress incontinence, when the muscle controlling urine is weakened. This mainly occurs during the daytime hours when a loved one is most active.

Medical procedures, decreased mobility and perhaps a urinary tract infection could also be causes for daytime incontinence.

Eliminating certain foods that irritate a bladder, such as caffeine and citrus, may help daytime incontinence. Learning how to suppress the urge to urinate may also be beneficial therapy.

Nighttime issues are often the result of overactive bladder. Keeping fluids to a minimum after dinner may help, as well as medication to aid in better sleep patterns.

No matter the time of day, incontinence is a symptom that can be managed with a few specific changes. Incontinence doesn't have to stop a loved one from living life the way they want to.

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Contact the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington at 360-694-8144 or ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov to learn more about supports available to family caregivers. Article content is provided by Active Daily Living.