

HOW TO TALK WITH SOMEONE ABOUT INCONTINENCE



In this AARP Home Alone AllianceSM video, a family caregiver talks to a friend about her mother's incontinence (reduced control of urination or bowel movements). The friend, who is a nurse who has special training in managing incontinence, reassures her that her discomfort in talking to her mother is not unusual. She recommends being respectful and compassionate, and ensuring that her mother understands that her daughter wants the best for her.

Here are some important points from the video:

- > Be mindful of the language you use, to maintain dignity. Don't use the word "diaper" if possible. An alternative might be "incontinence brief" or "padded underwear."
- > Choose your words carefully and try not to nag or to blame the individual.

As mentioned in the video, when first learning about the condition, caregivers can ask their family member these questions to determine the severity of the condition:

- > Do you have difficulty making it to the bathroom on time?
- > Do you urinate more than 8 times a day?
- > Do you get up more than once a night to go to the bathroom?
- > Are you using toilet paper, paper towels, or pads in your underwear to protect against accidents?

The caregiver in the video was fortunate to have a friend who is a nurse and one who knows a lot about incontinence. As a family caregiver you can discuss incontinence with many different health care professionals. Here are some possibilities:

- > A physician
- > Nurse or nurse practitioner
- > Physician assistant
- > Urogynecologist (a medical doctor who is specially trained to treat pelvic floor disorders, including urinary or fecal incontinence, constipation or pelvic floor prolapse, which is displacement of the uterus and/or vagina).

- > Urologist (a medical doctor who is specially trained to diagnose and treat diseases of the urinary tract in both men and women). Find out if the urologist treats incontinence, because not all do.

To find healthcare professionals in your area who specialize in managing incontinence, and for more details about incontinence, visit www.nafc.org, the National Association for Continence (NAFC) website. Find a professional who understands the emotional as well as the clinical side of incontinence. Being candid and compassionate is a necessary step as you manage your family member's incontinence and you need those characteristics in the health care professional as well.

Maintain a Bladder Diary

A final recommendation: Encourage your family member to keep a bladder diary for three to four days and bring it to the next appointment. Bladder diaries are mentioned in the video on managing incontinence at home in this series, but are particularly important in connection with doctor or nurse visits. Here's more information about bladder diaries:

- > Keeping a record of your family member's urinary and bowel habits will help identify the times of day or activities that are related to incontinence so that changes can be made. You can suggest this idea to your family member and help fill it out if necessary. This diary should be shared with a health care provider who can suggest changes in diet or activity to manage incontinence.
- > There are several varieties of bladder diaries available on the Internet. Typically, they have spaces for time of

day, drinks and food, trips to the bathroom, whether the person felt the urge to urinate, accidental leaks, and what the person was doing at the time.

- > NAFC has a bladder diary online at www.nafc.org/diaries/. The NAFC site also has a separate stool diary for bowel movements, which contains spaces for stool consistency, urgency, medications, and other items. The site also has a special diary for tracking nocturia (frequent trips to the bathroom at night) at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/597f302ed1758e9e17ad4099/t/5b43bfc8562fa7b38c6a187a/1531166675802/Nocturia+Symptom+Tracker.pdf>.

- > Another diary for overactive bladder symptoms is available on the Urology Care Foundation website at <https://www.urologyhealth.org/educational-materials/bladder-diary-x1660>.

Remember to take care of yourself as you help your family member. Find someone to talk to about your own feelings about handling this care. Look for support groups and message boards where people in similar situations share their experiences and suggestions. You are not alone!

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