

# MANAGING INCONTINENCE AT HOME



This episode in the AARP Home Alone Alliance<sup>SM</sup> series on managing incontinence (reduced control of urination or bowel movements) gives family caregivers some helpful suggestions. Following these guidelines at home makes it more likely that the person will feel comfortable going out for social or other events.

## Fluids and Snacks

Watching what goes into your family member's body will help you to better manage urine and bowel movements. As the family caregiver, encourage your family member to:

- > Drink 6 to 8 eight-ounce glasses of water or other fluids each day. (You may want to remind your family member that cutting back on fluids to avoid incontinence is not a good idea because it may lead to dehydration and other side effects.)
- > Avoid caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea, or carbonated soda.
- > Keep high-fiber snacks available. These could be fruit (pears and apples are especially good), whole grain products such as crackers or muffins, or vegetables (carrot sticks, celery). Check with a dietitian to find other snacks that have lots of fiber. When adding dietary fiber, be sure the person drinks the recommended amount of fluids daily to avoid constipation (difficulty having a bowel movement).
- > Make sure regular meals also have high-fiber foods.

## Keep Supplies Nearby

- > Set up the person's bedroom and bathroom so that everything is in within easy reach.
- > You'll need disposable gloves, cleaning wipes, and skin care products such as ointments or moisturizing lotions recommended by your health care provider. You may also want to have deodorizers.
- > If there are sensitive spots or a rash, use protective ointment or cream that contains zinc oxide or petroleum jelly.

## Toileting Safety

- > Keep the path to the bathroom clear and well-lit, especially at night, to help prevent falls. For example, removing small rugs can reduce the risk of falls.
- > Depending on the person's ability to move to the bathroom, consider using a raised toilet seat with arms, a bedside commode, or a portable urinal.

## Keep a Bladder Diary

A good way to manage incontinence at home is to keep a record of your family member's urinary and bowel habits. This 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. Try to keep a record for 3 or 4 full days before an appointment with a health care provider.

There are several varieties of bladder diaries available online. They have spaces for time of day, drinks and food, trips to the bathroom, whether or not the person felt the urge to urinate, accidental leaks, and what the person was doing at the time.

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

A similar diary for overactive bladder symptoms is available on the Urology Care Foundation. <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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