

SEEKING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT: MANAGING A FAMILY MEMBER'S INCONTINENCE



In this AARP Home Alone AllianceSM video, a group of family caregivers coping with their family member's incontinence (reduced control of urination or bowel movements) meet to discuss their feelings and concerns. Some of the concerns are common. You may be experiencing some of them.

- > **Feeling overwhelmed or guilty:** Probably every family caregiver feels overwhelmed at some point. Managing incontinence is particularly stressful because it's time-consuming, impacts personal privacy, and can be physically difficult. Sometimes the person you take care of may even be uncooperative. Getting angry at a family member who is incontinent hurts both the caregiver and the person. It may help to remember that incontinence is involuntary, not a deliberate action. Also, feelings of guilt may lessen when you realize that many caregivers experience frustration or anger at times.
- > **Feeling uncomfortable:** Family caregivers of a different gender from the person with incontinence—a son caring for his mother, for example—may find the experience particularly upsetting. And the mother may share that feeling. It may also be upsetting when roles in the relationship change and adult children become the caregiver of their parents. Acknowledging these feelings, but not dwelling on them, may help improve the situation.
- > **Financial concerns:** Financial issues may create problems in obtaining incontinence supplies. Family caregivers should research suppliers to find the best possible price. Buying in bulk may be cheaper than buying a little at a time. Talk with health care providers and other caregivers to get ideas about how to manage the costs. Some community organizations may provide

financial help. Check with your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). You can find it using this Eldercare Locator site: https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/About/Aging_Network/AAA.aspx. Or call 1-800-677-1116.

Sources of Family Caregiver Support

- > Take time for yourself. Remember that to provide the best care to the person with incontinence, you also have to be at your best. Even though it may be hard to follow this advice, a regular walk or a brief break can be revitalizing. The Alzheimer's Association and other organizations may provide respite services to allow you to attend caregiver support group meetings and other activities. Contact your local AAA (see above) or talk with your health care provider to see what services are available to you.
- > Ask family members and friends for help. Be open to and appreciative of their efforts to help make the job easier for you.
- > Talking to a doctor or nurse may reduce some of the negative emotions. But also look for other sources of support, such as message boards on websites or support groups like the one shown in the video. A good place to start is the National Association for Continence at www.nafc.org. Remember, you are not alone!

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