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## WHY DO PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA HAVE TROUBLE WITH BLADDER AND BOWEL CONTROL?

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People with dementia have memory loss. They may be confused and not know where they are. This confusion can cause bladder and bowel control problems or make the problems worse.

People with dementia may have trouble with:

- knowing they need to pass urine or empty their bowels
- holding on until they get to the toilet
- finding the toilet
- knowing they need to unzip trousers when going to the toilet
- knowing they need to pull down their pants when going to the toilet
- being away from home and not knowing where the toilet is
- urinating or opening their bowels in places they should not
- depression, anxiety, stress or illness. These can make bladder and bowel control problems worse.

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## CAN ANYTHING BE DONE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA WHO HAVE TROUBLE WITH BLADDER AND BOWEL CONTROL?

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Yes.

Dementia may rule out some treatments but there are still ways to provide comfort and dignity.

### **Here are some tips to work in a helpful way with people with dementia**

- Watch the person's bladder and bowel habits for a while. This may show a pattern of toileting habits.
- Watch for signs that they want to go to the toilet. For example, they may become restless, walk a certain way or pull at their clothing. The person can then be taken to the toilet in time.
- People with dementia or confusion may not notice the urge to empty their bladder or bowels. This can lead to wetting of pants or leaking of normal bowel actions. A common time for bowel motions to happen is soon after a meal, often after breakfast.
- Listen with care and respond to the person.
- Get rid of clutter in the living areas. This may make it easier for them to find their way to the toilet.
- Keep the space around them simple and well known to them.
- Show respect and sincere care.

## Check bladder and bowel control

Seek help from their doctor, continence nurse advisor or continence physiotherapist.

A bladder and bowel control check-up will include a physical check. The health professional will ask about when, where and why problems happen.

The carer is often the best person to give the details needed. The carer might be asked to give details about:

- the time the person goes to the toilet and/or leaks
- how much leakage there is
- when and how often they open their bowels.

## How to help poor bladder and bowel control

- Make sure the person with dementia drinks fluid every day. Fluid is anything they drink and includes milk, juice and soup. The best fluid to drink is water.
- Fluids can:
  - make the bowels work better
  - keep the bladder healthy
  - help treat bladder infections.
- Cut down on drinks that contain caffeine. Caffeine can upset the bladder. There is caffeine in coffee and cola drinks. There is less caffeine in tea.
- Avoid constipation. Make sure the person:
  - eats two pieces of fruit and five serves of vegetables daily
  - drinks fluid every day. Fluid is anything they drink and includes milk, juice and soup. The best fluid to drink is water
  - keeps as mobile as possible.
- Treat constipation when it occurs.
- Watch for signs the person wants to go to the toilet.
- Make a note of the times they most often go to the toilet. Also note the times they are most often wet.
- Ask or help them to use the toilet at these noted times. Taking them to the toilet at these times may cut down on accidents.
- If they have trouble with zips or buttons change to track suits. Trousers with elastic waists are easier to use. You can also use Velcro to fasten trousers.
- Keep the path to the toilet clear. Don't leave things in the way that might make it harder to get to the toilet.
- A night light may help. This can make the toilet door easier to see.
- Use outside help to ease the load of caring for a person with dementia. You may be able to get help with laundry, shopping and respite care from health and community organisations.

## Seek advice

The doctor, continence nurse advisor or continence physiotherapist can help find the causes of the problem. They can then suggest ways to treat problems including:

- reviewing their medicines
- suggesting the use of products to contain bladder and bowel loss. These might be pads or special pants. You can get advice about the right types of products to use. These products aim to improve quality of life.

You may be able to get funds to help pay for continence products. You can get advice about eligibility by calling the **National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66**.

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## CAN MEDICINE HELP WITH BLADDER AND BOWEL CONTROL?

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Yes.

- Antibiotics may be given to treat a bladder infection.
- If dementia is mild, tablets may be given to help settle an overactive bladder and help the bladder store more urine. They can cut down the number of times the person goes to the toilet. It is normal to go to the toilet about four to six times during the day and get up once each night over an eight hour sleep.
- In some men with big prostates, the urethra (urine tube) is too narrow to let the urine out. Sometimes medicine can make it easier to pass urine in this situation.
- Some medicines may cause bladder and bowel control problems, or make them worse. Medicines should be checked by a doctor and may need to be changed.

## Side effects of medicines

The use of medicines should be managed with care by their doctor. Tell the doctor about any problems the medicines cause. Some medicines for bladder and bowel control problems may cause new problems.

Side effects might include:

- increased confusion
- dry mouth
- constipation
- poor balance
- lack of energy.

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## SEEK HELP

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You are not alone. Poor bladder and bowel control can be cured or better managed with the right treatment. If you do nothing, it might get worse.

Phone expert advisors on the National Continence Helpline for free:

- advice
- resources
- information about local services.

1800 33 00 66\* (8am–8pm Monday to Friday AEST)

To arrange for an interpreter through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), phone 13 14 50 Monday to Friday and ask for the National Continence Helpline.

Information in other languages is also available from [continence.org.au/other-languages](http://continence.org.au/other-languages)

For more information: [continence.org.au](http://continence.org.au), [pelvicfloorfirst.org.au](http://pelvicfloorfirst.org.au), [bladderbowel.gov.au](http://bladderbowel.gov.au)

\* Calls from mobiles are charged at applicable rates.

