

Church Name

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## ASSISTING OLDER ADULTS WITH TOILETING

### Tips to help the older adult maintain independence with toileting:

- To enable the older adult to get to the bathroom easily and safely, remove obstacles in the pathway to the bathroom and keep a hallway and a bathroom light on at night.
- Provide clothing that can be quickly and easily managed when going to the toilet. Substitute velcro fasteners for buttons.
- If incontinence pads are worn, choose a panties style that is easily lowered for toileting.

### Tips for promoting safety of the older adult while toileting:

- Remove scatter rugs from the bathroom floor.
- Monitor the bathroom floor for water puddles and wipe these up immediately, as these are a fall risk.
- Install grab bars conveniently located to assist the older adult in transferring on and off of the toilet.
- If toilet transfers are difficult, purchase a raised toilet seat, available at any medical supply store. If the difficulty with toilet transfers is a temporary problem, as after a hip fracture or surgery, loaner raised toilet seats are available at Goodwill (553 Fairview Av. N.; St. Paul, MN 55104; 651-379-5922).

### A few thoughts about incontinence:

- It is a myth that incontinence is an expected part of aging. New incontinence, especially, needs to be investigated. Ask the older adult's physician for a thorough work-up to try to determine the cause. If no solution is discovered, ask for a referral to a urologist.
- Older adults will be reticent to talk about incontinence. Look for indicators of incontinence in their bathroom and note any urine odor on their person. Bring up the subject in a matter-of-fact manner. Let them know that the incontinence may be reversible, if treated, and may be a sign of something that shouldn't be ignored.
- Not all incontinence is alike:
  - Urge incontinence happens when the older adult can't get to the bathroom quickly enough.
  - Stress incontinence happens as a result of coughing, sneezing, lifting, or straining,
  - Overflow incontinence happens when the older adult is not emptying his/her bladder completely. Men with enlarged prostates are especially prone to this problem. Retention of urine in the bladder can cause a urinary tract infection.
- Incontinence may be the only sign of a urinary tract infection in older adults. They are less likely to present with the classic symptoms of urgency, painful urination, and burning on urinating.
- Establish a regular schedule for toileting—before the urge comes. By then it may be too late to prevent accidents. Keep a diary of toileting times and accidents for a few days to determine this schedule.
- Be sure that the older adult gets adequate fluids during the day hours, up to and including the supper meal—at least eight eight-ounce glasses a day (unless a medical condition requires fluid restriction). An adequate fluid intake is essential to produce the urge to pass urine. Strong, concentrated urine is irritating to the bladder and more likely to cause incontinence. However, limit fluids after supper, and if nighttime incontinence and/or multiple trips to the bathroom at night are a problem, avoid coffee or tea at supper.
- The older adult may need to avoid beverages such as coffee, tea, and sodas altogether. These act as diuretics and pull fluid out of the body.
- If the older adult is on a diuretic (water pill), give doses early in the day: at breakfast for once daily doses; at breakfast and the noon meal (not supper) for twice daily doses.
- Whenever the older adult attends some event, remind him/her to locate the rest room before it is needed.
- Incontinence in women can be caused by weakened pelvic floor muscles as a result of childbirth. Kegel exercises which contract these muscles may be helpful to strengthen them. To locate the targeted muscles, try to stop the flow of urine mid-stream; then contract and relax these muscles for 25 repetitions three times a day. (OVER)

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- Avoid bladder irritants such as inhaled cigarette smoke (even second-hand) and alcoholic beverages. Chocolate, spicy foods, tomatoes, and citrus foods can also irritate the bladder.
- Incontinence pads come in many styles, including those specifically for men. Pull-up styles are probably easiest to manage.
- If urgency is a real problem at night and/or if mobility is impaired, a bedside commode will help.
- If incontinence pads are worn, be sure that they are changed frequently to minimize irritation and possible break down of the skin. Cleanse the perineal (genital) area with each change of pads, using a wash cloth or wipes.

**If the older adult needs help using a bedpan:**

- Provide privacy.
- Warm the bedpan with some hot water. The flat end of the bedpan goes under the older adult's buttocks. A fracture bedpan, which is flatter at the end that goes under the buttocks, is easier to put in place. Lightly dusting the flat part of the bedpan with baby powder or cornstarch will also make it easier to slip in place.
- If the older adult is able, ask him/her to bend his knees, to press his/her heels against the bed, and to raise his/her hips to allow you to insert and remove the bed pan.
- If the older adult cannot raise his hips, roll him/her away from you and place the bedpan against his/her buttocks. Roll him/her back again, holding the bedpan in place. To remove it, roll the older adult to his/her side again, holding the bedpan securely so that it stays flat and doesn't spill.
- The older adult will find it easier to use the bedpan if you raise the head of the bed (if he/she has a hospital bed). Lower the bed before removing bedpan from under the older adult.
- Keep toilet paper within reach.
- If it is necessary to assist the older adults with toilet hygiene, wear disposable gloves and use perineal wipes or a wet washcloth. Clean older women from front to back; repeat with a different wipe or different area of the washcloth. Pat thoroughly dry.
- Provide a washcloth for the older adult to wash his/her hands.

**Tips for promoting regular bowel elimination:**

- While many people have one or two bowel movements a day, others go two or three days between movements. Lifelong habits have a large impact on the older adult's bowel habits. Learn the older adult's usual bowel routines and follow them.
- The older adult should be encouraged to try to have a bowel movement when he/she first gets the urge. It may take a little time sitting on the toilet before he/she gets results. These things cannot be rushed.
- Make sure the older adult's diet includes adequate fiber as found in whole wheat breads and cereals and fresh fruits and vegetables. Prunes are a good natural laxative as are bran cereals such as All Bran.
- An adequate fluid intake is critical to normal bowel elimination. The older adult should drink at least eight eight-ounce glasses of liquid each day.
- Establish a regular routine for bowel elimination. After breakfast in the morning works for many. A glass of hot liquid, even hot water can be a good bowel stimulant.
- Avoid the use of stimulant laxatives (e.g., Milk of Magnesia) unless absolutely necessary since these can be habituating. If it is necessary to use some medication to assist with bowel elimination a bulk laxative such as Metamucil or an equivalent brand provides a more natural remedy. To be effective bulk laxatives should be taken in the amount prescribed or as the label directs, in a full glass of liquid, followed by another full glass of liquid. A glycerine suppository may also be helpful.
- If problems continue, ask the physician or pharmacist if any of the older adult's medications are contributing to his/her constipation.
- Regular exercise promotes regular bowel elimination.

Report to the physician changes in the appearance of the stool, such as loose or watery stools, hard stools, blood or mucous in the stool, or black stools (unless the older adult is taking an iron supplement). Diarrhea is a symptom that can quickly become serious since it leads to dehydration and skin breakdown.

**Be alert for signs of a urinary tract infection (UTI):**

- New incontinence. (See prior section on incontinence.)
- Urine that is cloudy, has a strong smell and/or sediment. If urine is dark, encourage fluids and watch for a change. Normal urine is clear, light yellow and does not have a strong smell.
- An unexplained fall or sudden onset of, or increase in, confusion may be the only signs of a UTI in the older adult.