

# Continence promotion for people living with Dementia

## Patient information leaflet

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**If you need this leaflet in a different language or accessible format  
please speak to a member of staff who can arrange it for you.**

اگر به این بروشور به زبان دیگر یا در قالب دسترس پذیر نیاز دارید،  
لطفاً با یکی از کارکنان صحبت کنید تا آن را برای شما تهیه کند.

Jeśli niniejsza ulotka ma być dostępna w innym języku lub formacie,  
proszę skontaktować się z członkiem personelu, który ją dla Państwa przygotowuje.

Dacă aveți nevoie de această broșură într-o altă limbă sau într-un format accesibil,  
vă rog să discutați cu un membru al personalului să se ocupe  
de acest lucru pentru dumneavoastră

如果您需要本传单的其他语言版本或无障碍格式，请联系工作人员为您安排。

إذا احتجت إلى هذه النشرة بلغة أخرى، أو بتنسيق  
يسهل الوصول إليه، يرجى التحدث إلى أحد الموظفين لترتيب ذلك لك.

## Introduction

For individuals living with dementia, changes such as entering hospital can be overwhelming and confusing. The unfamiliar surroundings, increased noise and constant movement of people may contribute to disorientation.

## Hospital environment

- They may feel they do not have permission to look for the toilet, and are embarrassed to ask.
- They may not know where the toilets are, and feel uncertain if they can enter them.
- If admitted in an emergency and they are unwell and cannot communicate, continence products may need to be used to promote dignity and discomfort from soiled clothing.
- Upon transfer to the ward inform staff of their usual regime, if products are needed, or if they usually require prompting to go to the toilet.
- Moving ward areas can increase risk of delirium and add to confusion. Ensure they are orientated to their new environment.
- If you do not have a hospital passport, this will also aid the staff to meet your loved ones needs. You can download a passport from the website, alternatively, ask a member of staff to assist you.

Taking the person to the bathroom will promote familiarity and they will be less likely to decline. If they are incontinent, it is better to change products in the toilet to maintain dignity and assist with personal hygiene.

## Further Information

Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals have dementia and delirium teams, who support those living with dementia and those experiencing a delirium during their hospital admission.

The teams are available Monday to Friday, 8am—4pm and can support patients, their relatives and carers as well as Trust staff.

Our service at Southport & Ormskirk can be contacted by telephone: 01704 704 658.

Please leave a message and they will return your call as soon as possible.

Or email:

[soh-tr.dementiaanddeliriumteam@merseywestlancs.nhs.uk](mailto:soh-tr.dementiaanddeliriumteam@merseywestlancs.nhs.uk)

## Home environment

- Consider if they need to rest on the way to the toilet. Having a chair halfway there may help.
- Consider sensor lights that will turn on automatically.
- A black toilet seat on a white toilet (or any different colours) helps a person living with dementia visualise using it better.
- If there is a privacy lock in the bathroom, consider if they can use it or if they are at risk of locking themselves in. There are locks available that can be unlocked from outside the bathroom.
- If they are less mobile, they may benefit from a toilet frame, raised toilet seats or grab rails. Speak to your health care professional about a referral to the occupational therapist for further advice.
- Mirrors in the bathroom can cause issues for people with Dementia, as they may not recognise their own reflection. This can stop people from entering the bathroom as they think someone is in there. Consider repositioning it/ covering it if this is causing them problems.



## Communication

The way in which people communicate with dementia may change during the disease process. People may refuse to go to the toilet when asked even if they need to go. This could be for a number of reasons.

- It is easier to say “no” to a question rather than engage.
- Embarrassment.
- Not understanding the question or words used.
- Unable to respond appropriately due to memory impairment.
- Unable to recognise their own needs.
- Disorientation.

When someone is unable to express their needs, we may notice certain behaviours that can indicate someone has continence needs such as:

- Restlessness.
- Shuffling their feet.
- Walking or pacing.
- Changes in personality such as frustration or anxiety.
- Plucking/pulling at clothing or objects.
- Shouting.



If you observe any of these behaviours address continence needs promptly.

Maintaining adequate fluid intake is important for bladder and bowel health. However, some fluids can cause complications.

## Caffeine

Caffeine can stimulate the kidneys and irritate the bladder causing a person to pass more urine. By reducing/stopping this we can greatly improve symptoms. Caffeine is present in a variety of food and drinks such as:

- Tea and coffee.
- Carbonated drinks such as Cola and energy drinks.
- Chocolate and hot chocolate.

Caffeine affects the body for six hours, therefore it is advisable to not consume after 4pm. Decaffeinated alternatives are available from most major brands.



## Fruit juices

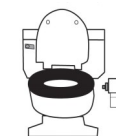
Fruit juice has health benefits, but again can be irritating to the bladder. If fruit juices are preferred, try to dilute them with water to a 50/50 mix. Avoid blackcurrant based cordials if possible, as these are known to irritate the bladder. Consider using lemon barley or cranberry juice, as these are particularly good for the bladder and may reduce episodes of cystitis. For more information on promoting hydration for people with dementia, please see the "Supporting eating and drinking in dementia care" leaflet.

- Some smaller pads have an adhesive strip on the bottom, which is used to adhere it in their own underwear: Ensure underwear is close fitting.
- Use the wetness indicator, usually a pattern or writing in blue ink down the centre. If it changes colour or smudges then this indicates it needs changing. If their bowels have been opened this will need changing regardless.
- When removing the pad, always do so from the front to back.
- Dispose of the pad in a small plastic bag to reduce odour in the home. Then this goes into general waste. If in hospital they need to go into a yellow bin.

## Prompted toileting

If a person is unable to get to the toilet independently due to physical or mental health needs, staff and carers can assist them by:

- Taking them to the toilet.
- Offering a bed pan or urinal.
- Using words that are familiar to the patient i.e. bathroom, loo.
- Being aware of how we assist them, i.e. would you like to come with me rather than do you need the toilet?
- Using technology if they live alone such as setting reminders on a smart speaker.

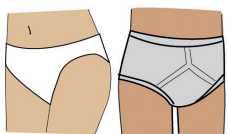


## Continence pads

Maintaining continence can often require the use of aids such as continence pads. These often come in a two piece system, consisting of a shaped pad and fixation pants, to ensure it fits closely to the body. There are many other aids available, and these can be discussed further with your local continence service.

### Fitting and disposal of the pad

- It is important to store continence pads in a dry area. Storing them in a humid area such as a bathroom can affect their absorbency.
- When applying the pad, first open and unroll it, then gently fold in half, being careful not to touch the inside of the product.
- Lightly squeeze down the centre to activate the absorbent material inside the pad.
- When fitting the pad, always fit the front first, then around the buttocks.
- Assist with the fixation pants and ensure these are comfortable, with no visible gaps around the pad when on.
- If using a barrier cream, this needs to be reapplied after every third episode of incontinence unless advised differently by a health care professional.



## Constipation

Constipation is a common issue among older adults, particularly those living with dementia. As we age, the bowel wall thins, and affects the movement of food through the digestive system (peristalsis). Constipation can be related to medication, poor fluid intake and limited mobility.

### Tips for managing constipation

- Aim for 'five a day' to increase fibre intake.
- Tinned fruit has the same amount of fibre as fresh, and is also softer and can be easier to swallow. This is a good option for people on a softer diet.
- Dementia can affect the person's taste, so try offering a variety of foods, even those the person may not have liked before developing dementia.
- Try to increase fluid intake by using higher fluid foods such as milky puddings, jelly, ice cream, soups and stews.
- Over the counter medications are available, which can help with occasional constipation, but if it is an ongoing problem it is important to speak to a healthcare professional.

## Hygiene

Personal hygiene can become more difficult for people living with dementia, and support with this is important to maintain their dignity and skin health. Incontinence can lead to skin problems, which typically starts with moist skin appearance (like being in the bath for too long) then if left untreated, it can progress to dry peeling skin and changes in colour.

### Tips for effective hygiene

- Gently check skin folds and crevices during hygiene routines, to identify early signs of irritation or skin breakdown.
- Use a neutral fragrance free soap, to ensure no skin irritation and rinse thoroughly.
- For female hygiene, ensure the person is always washed from front to back.
- For uncircumcised males, assist them if needed to clean behind the foreskin. If it is difficult to move, do not force it. If it is always too tight then speak to a healthcare professional for advice.
- If prescribed cream for skin protection or treatment, ensure this is water based. Use a pea size amount and apply to the affected areas, or all over if provided for protection.
- After cleaning, pat dry with a towel rather than rubbing as this is less harmful to the delicate skin.

By following these steps, care givers can help manage continence and ensure that people living with dementia receive the help they need to stay comfortable and maintain their dignity. Always consult a health care professional if you have any concerns.

