



Belfast Health
and Social Care Trust

Dementia and Behaviour - Promoting Continence



Information for carers

Community Mental Health Team for Older People

We hope this information helps you understand changes in your relative's behaviour due to dementia, and that you find some tips that work well for you both.

Share the tips that worked with family, friends and others who spend time with your relative, it will reassure them that they are doing all they can for both of you - give them this booklet to read or go through it together.

We have booklets on many other changes in behaviour that may occur due to dementia and would be very happy to share them with you.

Please call us on: 02895040346



Community Mental Health Team for Older People

Understanding Toileting in Dementia

We do many things every day without even thinking about how they happen, for example eating, drinking, getting washed and dressed and going to the toilet. These tasks are not as simple as you might believe, they involve both physical and thinking abilities.

Sometimes dementia can cause physical incontinence, a person may be unable to control their toileting. Where this is the case specialist advice is available from the Belfast Trust's Continence Team, speak with your relative's GP about this.

Sometimes difficulties with thinking and memory make it difficult for the person to find or use the toilet as well as they once did.

Think for a second, going to the toilet involves recognising the need to go, remembering where the toilet is or finding the toilet if you are out, being able to get there in good time, being able to remove your clothes, judging the distance between yourself and the toilet and being able to sort yourself out afterwards.

If your relative's memory and thinking abilities have decreased as part of their dementia, you might notice changes in behaviour at any of the above stages. This means, they may go to the toilet in an unusual place, or soil clothing, or be less tidy in the bathroom than they once were.

We are also quite private about going to the toilet and may be deeply embarrassed if we had an accident. Indeed it can be upsetting and embarrassing for all concerned if your relative has difficulty finding or using the toilet and then soil themselves or another area in the home. It is important to remember that mishaps such as this are due to dementia and that your relative would not intentionally embarrass themselves, you or others.

This booklet will share what other people who care for a person with dementia have found useful in preventing and dealing discretely with such situations.

Common Difficulties

- There are many reasons why your relative may not be making it to or using the toilet the way they used to. By taking some time to notice how your relative behaves, you may then be able to make more sense of their difficulties and be better able to respond.
- Constipation or urinary infections can make it difficult and perhaps painful to go to the toilet.
- Mobility problems such as arthritis can make it more difficult to get to the bathroom and unzip trousers/take down tights and underwear on time.
- They may be unable to find the toilet (especially at night). You may notice that your relative urinates in corners or cupboards etc. Usually this is a good indicator that they haven't been able to find the toilet.
- Your relative may not be able to react quickly enough to the sensation of needing to use the toilet, particularly if they have a urinary infection. You may notice your relative is wet before they make it to the bathroom, or they may make repeated trips to the toilet if they have an infection.

You may find your relative goes to the toilet in public or outside. This can happen for several reasons:

- It may be they have an urgency to go and they find as private a place as possible—perhaps the corner of a room, or behind a tree.
- This may have been a necessity at some stage, ie: when on a daytrip, or perhaps your relative worked outside and memories are being mixed up because of their dementia.
- They may not be able to tell you that they need to go to the toilet or it may be difficult for them to ask for help. You may notice your relative fidgeting with their clothes, perhaps pacing or 'searching', these can be signs that they need to go to the toilet.
- They may not be able to recognise the toilet, especially if it and your bathroom are both white.

What can help

You will want to make sure your relative stays as healthy as possible to help reduce any toileting discomfort.

- Encourage your relative to drink 6-8 glasses of fluid each day. Not drinking enough, or not drinking for long periods of time can cause urinary infections and constipation.
- Help your relative to eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables and fibre such as brown rice.
- Keep your relative active, going for walks and getting them involved in daily activities will help them to stay well.

Reminding or encouraging your relative to use the toilet can ensure they get to the toilet on time. Any one of the following tips may work for you both. This may also help if your relative is going to the toilet in public.

- Watch out for signs that your relative may need to go to the toilet such as fidgeting, restlessness, agitation, pacing or pulling off their clothes.

- Develop a routine where your relative goes to the toilet at certain times each day, for example first thing in the morning, before each meal and before bed.
- Give regular, sensitive reminders to your relative—ask questions like ‘do you need to go to the toilet?’ or ‘you haven’t been to the bathroom in a while, do you think you need to go?’
- Encourage your relative to go to the toilet every 2-3 hours.
- Create a schedule. We have included a pull out sheet which may help you with this. Think about how often your relative needs to go to the toilet, the times when your relative goes to the toilet or when they are most often wet.
- If your relative undresses to go to the toilet in public maintaining their privacy and dignity will be important to both of you. Perhaps cover or shield your relative from others, and encourage them to a private place when possible.

Helping your relative find and recognise the toilet

- Leave the bathroom door open and keep the bathroom as clear as possible, maybe remove any bins, baskets etc. and keep items in a closed cabinet. This can help your relative to recognise the room is the bathroom.
- Put a sign on the door that clearly says 'Bathroom' or 'Toilet' along with a picture of a toilet. This can help your relative to identify the toilet, particularly if it can't be seen from the door.
- Close the doors to any spare rooms. This will help your relative to find the bathroom more quickly and reduce the chance of them urinating or defecating in the wrong room, and it will help prevent them from becoming distracted.
- Keep hallways clear and clutter free. This can help reduce the chances of your relative getting distracted, or forgetting where they were going.
- At night, it may be useful to use night lights and keep lights on in the bathroom and hallway to help guide your relative.

- Mirrors or reflective surfaces can be difficult for people with dementia, they can misinterpret their own, or other people's, reflections, and think someone else is using the bathroom. Cover mirrors if necessary.
- Using a contrasting coloured toilet seat, for example a blue toilet seat on a white toilet. This will make the toilet easier for your relative to see.



- Keeping the bathroom clutter free can prevent your relative from getting distracted or mixed up about why they are there.

Supporting your relative to use the toilet

- Clothing that can be easily removed such as trousers with elastic waistbands may be helpful. It might be easier to avoid clothes with zippers or buttons.
- Handrails can help if your relative has mobility problems.
- You may want to try leaving a urinal bottle or commode beside the bed at night.
- When your relative is in the bathroom, give them space and privacy.
- Give your relative lots of time on the toilet to do whatever they need to do.
- Check with them that they have used the toilet in case they have forgotten or become distracted.
- If useful you could take your relative through the process of using the toilet a step at a time. For example start by letting them know they have to take off their trousers or pull up their dress. Once they have done that then remind them to sit on the toilet seat etc.

Dealing with accidents

While any of the tips mentioned can help, it is unlikely you will be able to prevent all difficulties all of the time; accidents may still happen. When this happens, managing the situation sensitively can help prevent any embarrassment or distress for your relative and you.

What can help

- Remind yourself that mishaps are due to dementia; your relative would not intentionally embarrass themselves, you or others. Doing so can help prevent any distress or frustration and can make it easier to manage things in a calm and caring way.
- Reassure your relative and let them know everything is ok. You may want to say 'something has spilled on you'
- Encourage them to get washed and into some clean clothes.
- It can be useful to be prepared, have a good supply of clean clothes for your relative.
- It may be helpful to settle your relative into another activity such as having a cup of tea, watching TV while you do any necessary tidying or cleaning.
- If your relative has become upset, distressed or frustrated, help them to move on, have a cup of tea together or do something together that they will enjoy.

Caring for yourself

All of the information in this booklet may make caring for your relative easier, but your well-being is just as important. You will find it easier to look after your relative the way you want to if you can get regular breaks. Ask friends and family to keep your relative company whilst you look after yourself, they will want to help.

If you have been caring for a while it might be hard to think of what you would do if you had a break!

What can help

- Catch up with some friends
- Go shopping for yourself
- Go for a walk
- Go for a relaxing bath



INSERT CHECKLIST GUIDE

How to contact us:



Community Mental Health Team for Older People Tel: (028) 9504 0346

operates from Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm

We also offer an extended telephone advice
and support service for people living with
DEMENTIA and their carers operating:
Monday to Friday until 8pm
Saturday to Sunday 10am to 2pm

If you need to speak to someone
outside these hours please contact:
Regional Emergency Social Work Service
(028) 9504 9999

[www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/services/
CommunityMentalHealthTeams](http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/services/CommunityMentalHealthTeams)

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