



CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH PHYSICAL NEEDS

Loss of Bladder Control (Urinary Incontinence)

Urinary incontinence is the loss of ability to hold in urine.

What Are the Causes of Urinary Incontinence?

Below are some common reasons why stroke survivors may have trouble controlling their bladder:

- Injury to the part of the brain that controls the urge to pass urine
- Memory problems and forgetting to urinate
- Trouble getting to the bathroom. It may be hard for survivors to walk to the toilet. They may also have a problem talking to people and asking for help.
- Illnesses like bladder infections
- Side effects of some medicines

What Do You Need to Know?

Almost all stroke survivors will have some degree of incontinence. Some survivors have accidents once in a while. Others cannot hold their urine at all. The good news is that incontinence can be managed, treated and sometimes cured.

Why Is It Important to Get Help?

Some problems with controlling loss of urine are due to illnesses or other easily treated problems. It is important that your loved one be looked at by a healthcare provider. Your healthcare team can work with you and your loved one to help manage the problem.

What Treatments Should You Discuss with Your Healthcare Team?

Regular or fixed toilet times – Visiting the toilet at fixed times may help to retrain the bladder and prevent accidents.

Bladder retraining with urge suppression – This may help survivors get control over the times they use the toilet. First, establish fixed toilet times. Slowly increase the time between trips to the toilet. Teach survivors to wait at least ten minutes after

they feel the need to urinate. Suggest ways to relax and postpone the urge to urinate. For example, have them think about pleasant events.

Exercises – There are exercises that can make the muscles that hold the bladder stronger. These exercises are called pelvic floor muscle exercises (Kegel exercises). The Mayo Clinic has more information about Kegel exercises on their Web site. Go to the “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet for a link.

A urinary foley catheter – This is a small tube that is sometimes used to pass urine soon after a stroke. The catheter is removed when the survivor no longer needs it. Foley catheters are used only when necessary. MedlinePlus has more information about how to care for catheters. The “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet has a link to their Web site.

A condom catheter – This is a pouch-like device that is placed around a man’s penis and then connects to a tube. The tube empties urine into a storage bag. MedlinePlus has information on how to care for condom catheters. The “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet has a link to their Web site.

Other devices and medicines – For women, medical devices that support the bladder, such as pessaries, are sometimes used. Some medicines can prevent accidents and calm the bladder.

Helpful Tips

Talk about the problem:

- First, talk with your healthcare team. Stroke survivors are often embarrassed and have trouble talking about incontinence. Directly discuss their concerns.
- Use sensitivity and tact. Remember that accidents happen and are not your loved one’s fault.

Ways to manage bladder control problems:

- Allow your loved one privacy and plenty of time to sit on the toilet.
- Make sure the survivor drinks four to six glasses of water during the day. Avoid fluids two to three hours before bedtime.
- Help the patient limit foods and beverages that irritate the bladder. Limit caffeine (such as coffee, tea, cola), artificial sweeteners, alcohol, chocolate, acidic foods (such as tomatoes, oranges) and very spicy foods.

Consider the purchase of products and equipment:

- A bedside commode or a urinal near the bed is often helpful. Put the commode and urinal in the closet during the day to avoid embarrassing your loved one.
- A raised toilet seat or grab bars in the bathroom may prevent falling.
- Disposable or washable bed pads are available in drug stores or medical supply houses. Place these pads underneath the sheets so they are less noticeable.
- On long trips, disposable undergarments may be used for protection. Designs to choose from include diapers, pads, underwear liners and undergarments that are worn just like regular underwear. Use these undergarments only when necessary. Your loved one may rely on them and avoid trying other options.

If your loved one has memory or communication problems:

- Watch for signs that your loved one needs to use the toilet. Common signs are changes in facial expressions, restlessness or aimless pulling at clothes.
- Help your loved one to the bathroom every two to three hours.
- Encourage and praise your loved one after toilet use.

If an accident occurs, try the following to remove stains:

- Mix together: one cup of hot (not boiling) tap water, one tablespoon of powdered laundry detergent, and one tablespoon of white vinegar.
- With a sponge, apply to the stained area until very wet.
- Place folded towels over the area to absorb the fluid.
- Leave towels in place overnight.

🚩 Red Flag: Changes in Urination

Call your healthcare provider **right away** if any of these changes occur:

- Changes in the usual amount, color and number of times urine is passed
- Pain or great difficulty when urinating
- Blood in urine

Remember

- The first step is to discuss incontinence problems with your healthcare team.
- Be sensitive and remember that accidents are not the fault of your loved one.
- The good news is that incontinence can be managed, treated and often cured.

More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

Link Disclaimer: Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

American Urological Association Foundation

Web: <http://www.urologyhealth.org>

Phone: 1-800-828-7866

The American Urological Association Foundation has information about treatments and products you can buy to help with incontinence. Go to this link:

<http://www.urologyhealth.org/adult/index.cfm?cat=03&topic=390>

Healthfinder

Web: <http://www.healthfinder.gov>

Healthfinder has a health encyclopedia with over 1,600 health-related topics. You can search for various physical needs such as urinary incontinence. Information also available in Spanish.

Internet Stroke Center

Web: <http://www.strokecenter.org>

Phone: 1-314-362-3868

The Internet Stroke Center has information on how to talk with your loved one about incontinence. Go to this link: <http://www.strokecenter.org/care/incon.html>

There is also a section on information for caregivers. Go to this link:

<http://www.strokecenter.org/patients/caregivers.htm>

Mayo Clinic

Web: <http://mayoclinic.com>

The Mayo Clinic has information for women on how to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. The exercises to strengthen these muscles are called Kegel exercises. Go to this link: <http://mayoclinic.com/health/kegel-exercises/WO00119>

MedlinePlus

Web: <http://medlineplus.gov>

MedlinePlus will direct you to information on many health topics including how to care for catheters. Information is also available in Spanish.

My HealthVet (MHV)

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet (MHV) provides trusted information on stroke and other health conditions. It also provides resources for stroke caregivers and tools to track your loved one's health.

Also visit the Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealthVet Web site. This section provides more information on caregiving.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says "Enter Here"
- Click on "Research Health" on the top bar, then "Healthy Living Centers"
- Click on "Caregiver Assistance"

National Stroke Association

Web: <http://www.stroke.org>

Phone: 1-800-787-6537

The National Stroke Association has helpful information on "Recovery After Stroke: Bladder & Bowel Function." Go to this link:

http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/NSAFactSheet_BowelAndBladder.pdf?docID=984

Strength for Caring

Web: <http://www.strengthforcaring.com>

Phone: 1-866-466-3458

Strength for Caring has information for caregivers on caring for someone with physical needs. They have information on "Bladder & Bowel Problems." Go to this link: <http://www.strengthforcaring.com/daily-care/daily-care-bladder-and-bowel/>

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

References: National Stroke Association. (2006). Stroke Facts; *Recovery after Stroke: Bladder & Bowel Function*. Retrieved June 30, 2008, from http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/NSAFactSheet_BowelandBladder.pdf?docID=984; How to Care. (2000). *Your Eldercare Survival Guide*. Retrieved June 30, 2008, from <http://www.howtocare.com>; Dreslin, J. (n.d.). *Stroke Awareness for Everyone; Stroke Caregivers Handbook*. Retrieved on June 30, 2008, from <http://www.strokesafe.org/Handbook.html>.



These materials were created for the project:

Web-Based Informational Materials for Caregivers of Veterans Post-Stroke

Project Number SDP 06-327 funded by VA HSR&D Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI)

