
Managing Bladder Incontinence

What is bladder incontinence?

- Loss of bladder control causing loss of urine
- The problem has varying degrees of severity. Some people have only small leaks or dribbles of urine, while others lose large amounts of urine at a time.
- Bladder muscles and nerves as well as the brain all work together to control bladder function
 - A problem in any of these areas can result in incontinence
 - Infection, constipation and mobility problems can also cause incontinence
- Urine left on the skin can lead to irritation and odors

What can I do to control urinary leakage?

- Establish a regular pattern of urinating
 - Plan to go to the toilet every two hours while awake and before bedtime
- Make it easier to get to the bathroom
 - Use a bedside commode, urinal or bedpan
- Protect your privacy and dignity
- Avoid fluids or foods that contain caffeine (soft drinks, coffee, tea or chocolate)
- Avoid alcohol as it can over stimulate the bladder
- Ask your nurse about
 - Exercises that can help develop more control
 - Medications that may help improve bladder function

What can be done to prevent odor or skin irritation?

- Keep skin clean and dry
 - Take extra care to wash and dry the area
 - Products are available that can help you feel clean and eliminate odor
 - Use barrier creams to protect skin from urine
- Use protective products to try to keep clothing dry
 - Your nurse can help you select which type of garment and products would be most helpful for you
 - Change the garment frequently
- Wash your hands before and after care to prevent infection
- Ask your nurse for things that can further control any odors

What to discuss with the hospice and palliative nurse?

- Changes in your bladder function
 - Burning, pain or discomfort with urination
 - Changes in the amount, frequency, color or odor of urine
- Medications
 - Many medications can cause incontinence
- Skin irritation

Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at www.HPNA.org.

Reference

Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2011.

Hospice and Palliative Nursing Assistant Core Curriculum, Pittsburgh, PA: Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association; 2009.

Approved by the HPNA Education Committee, June 2007
Reviewed January 2009, July 2013

orig. 06 07, rev. 01 09, rev 07 13