

# INCONTINENCE IN OLDER ADULTS

## FACTS

- Incontinence means a person cannot control the bladder and/or bowels.

## CAUSES

- Constipation
- Urinary tract infections
- Weak bladder muscles
- Overactive bladder
- Nerve damage from diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and other diseases
- Enlarged prostate in men
- Injury, or damage to nerves and muscles from prostate surgery
- Balance or gait problems that cause difficulty getting to the bathroom fast enough
- Pelvic organ prolapse, displacing the bladder and urethra
- Loss of ability to sense the need to urinate
- Forgetting to go the physical bathroom
- Inability to find the toilet

## STRATEGIES

### Urinary incontinence

- Decrease or eliminate caffeine intake.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Drink a cup of fluid all at one time rather than sipping a beverage over a longer period of time.
- Keep pathways and bathroom well-lit, clear, and clutter-free.
- Mark the bathroom with a big sign that reads "Toilet" or "Bathroom."
- Provide regular bathroom breaks, every 2-3 hours.

- Supply easy-to-remove underwear and clothing.
- Use disposable underwear, especially away from home.
- Utilize waterproof mattress pads and other protective covers for bed linens.
- Gentle-but-thorough cleaning and drying of the private area is essential for keeping the skin healthy.
- Application of a skin barrier ointment can further protect the private area from moisture and irritation.

### **Bowel incontinence**

- Eat 20-30 grams of fiber per day. This can make stool more bulky and easier to control.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol to help prevent diarrhea.
- Drink several glasses of water each day to prevent constipation.
- To minimize accidents, schedule bowel movements at the same times each day, especially after meals.
- Gentle-but-thorough cleaning and drying of the private area is essential for keeping the skin healthy.
- Application of a skin barrier ointment can further protect the private area from moisture and irritation.

### **Disposable underwear**

- Many factors are considered when choosing the right incontinence product. Some trial and error is usually required.
- Separate daytime and nighttime products may be needed.
- Features to consider:
  - Absorbency
  - Flexibility that supports activity level
  - Gender-specific or unisex
  - Sizing – Proper sizing is essential to prevent leakage
  - Style – Tab-style, pull-ons, slimmer profile for daytime outings

- Cost – Inquire about free samples and manufacturers coupons while considering which product works best
  - Products that trap and wick moisture away from the skin and feature a soft breathable lining
- In some states, Medicaid covers the cost of adult disposable briefs. Some private insurance providers may cover the cost. Medicare does not cover the cost.
  - If a medical diagnosis supports the use of disposable underwear, the cost may be deducted as a medical expense on an annual tax return.