



Managing Incontinence in Person with Dementia: Diet and Fluid Adjustments

FLUID ADJUSTMENT

- Many individuals with dementia (e.g., Alzheimer's disease) do not drink enough fluid. Unless there is a medical reason to limit fluid, most individuals should be encouraged to drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid (e.g., water) a day to avoid dehydration.
- Older people may not be as thirsty as younger ones, so offer your relative water regularly.
- Offer more water during the day than before bedtime, to avoid incontinence or having to get up during the night to use the toilet. If your relative does not eat enough, offer fluids with calories (e.g., milk, juice, Ensure® nutritional drink) after meals.
- Drinking beverages with caffeine may contribute to incontinence, although the link has not been proven. If you think it might help, try reducing or eliminating caffeinated beverages. If it doesn't help, you can always go back to caffeinated drinks.
- If your relative drinks large amounts of fluid, you might try decreasing his or her intake to eight 8-ounce glasses per day to see if it helps reduce incontinence. However, few studies have examined the effectiveness of fluid adjustments for reducing urine leakage, especially in persons with dementia.

DIET ADJUSTMENT

- Many people, even those without dementia, eat less than the recommended 25 grams of dietary fiber per day.
- Attaining this amount of fiber from foods may be difficult. In this case, a powdered fiber supplement (e.g., psyllium, sold under brand names such as Metamucil®) may be recommended. One study reported less fecal incontinence with daily use of psyllium. If your relative doesn't like to drink the fiber supplement in juice, you can try adding it to baked goods. If your relative is able to take pills or chewable tablets, fiber supplements are also available in these forms. One example of a chewable tablet is FiberChoice®.
- Some individuals notice that certain foods or food types worsen fecal incontinence. Examples of foods that may increase gas production include beans and cabbage. Other troublesome foods might be fatty or greasy foods (e.g., spare ribs), spicy or peppery foods, caffeinated or alcoholic drinks, nuts or popcorn, and dairy foods (e.g., milk, chocolate).
- Examining the diet of your family member and associations of a food with their pattern of incontinence may identify foods to avoid or restrict. Because many people with dementia do not eat enough calories or have a well-balanced diet, restrict foods cautiously. If the incontinence does not improve, the restricted foods should be reintroduced into their diet. Very few studies have investigated the effectiveness of diet adjustments for fecal incontinence, especially in persons with dementia.