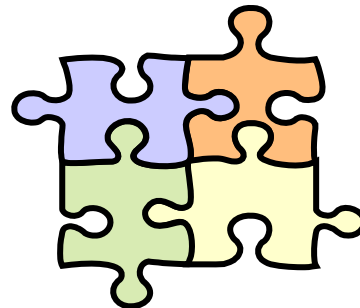


The Relationship Between Incontinence and Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia

Incontinence is the inability to control urination, bowel movements, or both. It can have many causes, such as:

- Alzheimer's disease or Dementia (AD)
- Short-term illnesses (e.g., as urinary tract infection)
- Chronic illnesses (e.g., diabetes, Parkinson's disease, heart failure, sleep apnea)
- Use of certain medications
- Childbirth
- Surgery



Some causes of incontinence (e.g., a urinary tract infection) can be reversed, while others require long-term management. Successful management relies on accurately identifying the cause of your loved one's incontinence with his or her healthcare provider.

A common disorder that increases with age, incontinence affects about half of nursing home residents. Urinary incontinence is more common in women (20% to 40%) than in men (10% to 15%), and in white women than in African-American women. About 10% of men and women have fecal incontinence, or the inability to control bowel movements. Many people have both types of incontinence.

Because successfully using the bathroom involves many complex conscious and subconscious processes, at least 30% of people with AD are estimated to have incontinence. Incontinence in people with dementia is due primarily to the decline in mental function rather than problems with the urinary or bowel systems. People with AD may have difficulty with:

- Identifying the need to go to the bathroom
- "Holding on" until they get to a toilet
- Recognizing a toilet and remembering what it is used for
- Adjusting their clothing
- Sitting on the toilet
- Relaxing sufficiently to eliminate urine or bowel movements

Urinary incontinence that is due to causes other than dementia comes in several forms that may overlap:

- **Stress urinary incontinence** occurs during increases in abdominal pressure (e.g., sneezing, coughing, bending over, laughing) and usually involves the loss of only a small amount of urine. This is the most common form in women.
- **Urge urinary incontinence** is associated with a sudden strong urge to urinate, often due to contraction of the bladder. Also called *overactive bladder*, this type of incontinence can lead to the loss of large amounts of urine and may occur frequently. In some people, it occurs during sleep (called *nocturia*). Urge urinary incontinence is the most common form of urinary incontinence in men.
- **Overflow urinary incontinence** occurs in conditions that result in an inability to completely empty the bladder (e.g., enlarged prostate).

Fecal incontinence can also take these same forms but is usually referred to as just *fecal incontinence*.