



At Arbor Springs we are dedicated to helping families manage the realities of dementia with as much love, dignity, and knowledge as possible. This monthly e-newsletter is our way of offering helpful tips and insights that will hopefully make your days with your loved one a little easier, happier, and calm.

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, your loved one will need more and more help with the seemingly simple activities of daily living (ADLs). To assist with these activities, caregivers need knowledge, skill, and patience.

You may find that your loved one has more trouble going to the bathroom and using the toilet as his/her dementia progresses. Some reasons why a person with dementia might experience problems using the toilet include:

- The person might not be able to find or recognize the toilet.
- The person might have difficulty communicating his/her need to go to the bathroom.
- The person might not be able to get to the toilet or undo his/her clothing in time.
- The person might experience difficulties with one or several steps of the process of successfully using the toilet.
- The person might be incontinent as a direct symptom of their advancing dementia. You should, however, never assume that the person has become incontinent until possible medical reasons have been fully explored. Make an appointment for your loved one to have a full medical assessment to rule out infections, treatable conditions, and to review medications.

Caregivers can do several things around the house to make it easier for their loved one with dementia to get to and to use the bathroom.

1. Have easy access to the bathroom. Make sure that there is a bathroom nearby for your loved one, especially for nighttime visits. It is important that he or she has access to a toilet that is on the same floor as close to his or her bedroom as possible. If it is not possible to be near a bathroom, try placing a commode or urinal in the bedroom.
2. Make the bathroom easy to identify. Clearly mark the path on walls and/or floors. If there is a hallway or space between his or her room and the bathroom, you can place reflective tape and night lights to mark the pathway. Use a bright, contrasting color for the bathroom door as a simple way for your loved one to notice the bathroom. Leave the door at least partially open so that your loved one can see the toilet. You can also label the bathroom door with words and a picture of a toilet. You may want to use a contrasting,

colored toilet seat or colored water to help prevent accidental misses due to perceptual or visual losses. Put lids on waste paper baskets and other containers that may be mistaken for toilets or move these items to other areas of the home.

3. Try setting a regular schedule for toilet use. For example, remind/assist your loved one to the bathroom first thing in the morning, every two hours during the day, immediately after meals, and just before bedtime. Keep a written chart documenting when he/she successfully goes to the bathroom as well as when and how much he/she eats and drinks. Identify when accidents occur, then tailor the toileting schedule to your loved one's needs. If accidents continue to occur, products such as disposable underwear or panty liners might be helpful but should be used only when necessary. You should continue to take your loved one to the bathroom on a regular basis even when he/she is wearing an incontinent product. Watch for visible cues that he/she needs to use the bathroom. For example, he/she may get restless, make unusual sounds or faces, pull on his/her clothing, or pace. You may have to respond quickly if he/she indicates the need to use the bathroom.
4. Take into account your loved one's health and disabilities and make necessary adaptations. Your bathroom should be safe and easy to use for your loved one. Install hand rails beside the toilet and a raised toilet seat to make sitting down and getting up easier. Have your loved one wear easy-to-remove clothing, such as Velcro closings or elastic waists. Ensure medications and sharp/dangerous objects are not accessible in the bathroom. Remove door locks if your loved one isn't able to unlock the door without help.
5. Keep your loved one hydrated. Dehydration can lead to other problems, including urinary tract infections and increased incontinence. While it's important to keep your loved one hydrated, you may want to try reducing liquid consumption during the two hours before bedtime in order to decrease the frequency of bathroom trips at night as well as incidents of incontinence. Discourage your loved one from drinking alcohol or caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, and carbonated drinks close to bedtime as these drinks act as diuretics and increase urgency with urination.
6. Provide the level of assistance in the bathroom that your loved one needs. An individual may have difficulty with one part of the process of using the toilet. A person with dementia might, for example, sit down on the toilet without pulling down his/her pants. Caregivers may need to remind the person to do this before he/she sits down. Caregivers may need to give a cue for their loved one to get started on the toilet, such as running water or giving the person a drink to stimulate urination. Assist him/her as needed throughout the toileting process, while moving slowly and encouraging him/her to help as he/she is able. Don't rush the person; allow time for him/her to empty his/her bowel or bladder. Provide as much privacy and modesty as possible and always use adult words rather than baby talk to refer to using the toilet.

It's so important to do all we can to help people to use the toilet. It's such a private part of our lives and so embarrassing when something goes wrong. If problems do occur, we need to be very sensitive and understanding towards the person. We also need to be committed to finding out the cause and doing all we can to prevent it from happening again.

If you have specific questions that you would like answered in an upcoming issue of this e-newsletter please reach out to Monica Kuehl, RN, BSN, Director of Marketing/Admissions at m.kuehl@arborsprings.org or at 515-223-1135 and I'll do my best to get to them all.