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Helping Your Senior Loved One Manage Incontinence

Over 8 million Canadians coast-to-coast are caregivers for a family member, friend or loved one. That's almost 1 in 4 of us across the country who have devoted love, attention, time and resources to ensuring loved ones are well taken care of. As our population continues to age, more and more Canadians are going to find themselves stepping up as caregivers to elderly parents, grandparents and loved ones.

With 1 in 5 senior adults in Canada experiencing some form of urinary incontinence, it shouldn't be overly surprising if you come to find out that your elderly loved one is experiencing continence issues. It can be overwhelming, and sometimes even frightening, at first as you try to determine the best way to help to ensure your loved one is living their best quality of life.

We're here to help make things a little easier. This guide includes information to support you in determining how best to help your loved one manage their incontinence. It will cover everything from figuring out if your senior parent is experiencing continence issues, to choosing the right product to help them manage their incontinence. We hope this helps. Please don't hesitate to give us a call Toll Free at 1-877-775-6656 if you have any questions or need some help. Our team of experts are equipped with information and resources to help you figure this out.

Determining If Your Loved One is Experiencing Incontinence

Incontinence can be a touchy subject. If your loved one is experiencing continence issues, it's likely that they are scared, embarrassed, frustrated or even ashamed. These feelings are perfectly normal, but unfortunately they are often the reason why many people who experience incontinence don't reach out for help. So if your loved one hasn't brought the problem to your attention yet, there are a few tell tale signs that can help you figure out if your Mom or Dad is dealing with continence issues. Here are a few things to look for:



- A urine scent in the living rooms or bedrooms.
- A favourite chair that has been covered with a protective cover, or has been replaced entirely.
- Heavily-soiled clothing in the laundry or hidden away in cupboards or closets (particularly if your loved one is experiencing any level of dementia).
- Multiple hand-washed undergarments drying in the bathroom.
- New stains on carpets or furniture, or evidence of several recent scrubbing to upholstered furniture.
- New packages of feminine hygiene products in the bedroom or bathroom (either for men, or for women who have passed menopause).

Any combination of these above signs likely mean that your loved one is experiencing some form of continence issues, and they may need some help better managing the condition.

Discussing Continence Issues with Your Loved One

Although incontinence is quite common in seniors, those who experience continence issues are often embarrassed and/or scared. If you feel that your loved one is experiencing some form of continence issues, it's probably a good idea to lend a hand and offer that person support.

Bringing up the topic isn't always easy. If you Mom or Dad has brought the topic to your attention, that's great but unfortunately that isn't the case for most. You'll need to be gentle and sensitive to their emotions when you bring up the issue. Here are a few tips for discussing continence issues with your loved one:

- Do some research on incontinence to learn more. 3.3 million Canadians manage some form of incontinence for a variety of reasons. These types of facts and statistics may help your loved one realize that this is a very common problem and that they are not alone.
- Make sure you bring up this topic privately. Ask to talk to your Mom or Dad in another room or step outside for a moment. If you have siblings it might be a good idea to let them know what's going on so they are in the loop.



- When starting the conversation, be very gentle with your words. You can use observations you're made to explain why you are concerned this is an issue they may be experiencing. Here's an example of a good conversation starter: *"Dad, I don't want to pry, but I noticed a box of maxi pads in the bathroom. Are you having trouble getting to the washroom?" or "Mom, I don't mean to embarrass you, but there's a urine smell in the bedroom. I'm worried and I'd like to help. Should we maybe go see your doctor?"*
- Although some feel relieved that the issue is out in the open and help is available, however it's common to be met with objections when bringing up this topic. If you're loved one objects or finds your questions invasive, it's important to be persistent without being pushy. Don't make your loved one feel like they are being forced to talk about this issue, instead try expressing your worry or concern along with some ideas you have to help. An example of a good response to an objection would be: *"I'm sorry, I don't want to embarrass you. But I'm worried about you. I've been doing some research and I think I can help. Can I tell you what I've learned so far?" or "I'm sure it's nothing serious and it IS a pretty common problem, but I think it's worth talking to the doctor about and finding some better products for you to try."*

It's also important to note that if your loved one is highly resistant to talking, it might not be the right time to discuss the problem. Consider stepping back and giving them some time to think about it before bringing up the topic again. Again, be gentle and kind even when ending a conversation without resolution. If you show frustration or anger that they don't want to talk, your loved one is probably less likely to bring the issue up or ask for help later on.

Check out our complete guide to Talking to Your Loved One About Incontinence at <https://healthwick.ca/blogs/news-and-articles/talking-to-your-loved-one-about-incontinence>.

What You Need to Know & Next Steps

It's important to remember that while incontinence is very common among seniors, it is not something that should be considered a normal part of aging. Continence issues are usually a sign or a symptom of something else that is wrong in the body, which is why it's important to discuss the problem with your healthcare professional. A doctor or nurse will be able to help you and your loved one determine what the issue is and how to best treat or manage these continence issues.

When discussing the topic with your loved one's doctor, they're likely going to ask a series of questions to help determine what



type of incontinence they are experiencing and how to best treat or manage it. In preparation for those questions, it's helpful to keep a "voiding diary" or "bladder journal" (voiding is a term to describe a bladder leak or an entire emptying of one's bladder). This journal is a collection of information about your loved one's condition. It should include the information listed below along with the exact time of the occurrence:

- What your loved one is eating and drinking, how much and at what time.
- How much urine your loved one is passing and when.
- The sensation your loved one experienced at the time of voiding (for example, did their bladder empty without the feeling or needing to urinate, or was there an urgent need to use the restroom and the voiding occurred before they could reach the toilet?).
- When leakage is occurring and any triggers or events that may be associated (for example, if voiding occurs when your loved one laughs or sneezes)

Your doctor may encourage you to continue helping your loved one maintain a regular voiding journal. The information you collect for this journal may continue to help your loved one's healthcare professional learn more about their condition and how to better treat/manage it.

It's also a good idea to research incontinence. There is lots of great information available about the different types of incontinence, signs and symptoms. Learning more about the condition may help you better understand what your loved one is going through. You can check out this article on our website to learn more about incontinence and Canadian statistics:

<https://healthwick.ca/blogs/news-and-articles/welcome-november-national-incontinence-awareness-month>.

Helping Your Loved One Manage Incontinence



After discussing incontinence with your loved one's doctor or healthcare professional, you'll need to determine how to best manage this condition. Absorbent products are likely the best option for managing incontinence, and there are a few different options available.

Below are the most common types of incontinence products available on the market. Each suits slightly different needs and there are multiple options for absorbency level.



- **Adult Diapers** - Also known as adult briefs for incontinence briefs, adult diapers are a common solution for those managing heavy to severe day or nighttime urinary or bowel incontinence. Adult diapers often offer the highest absorbency, and they are easier to put on and take off when changing an individual. Briefs have tabs on the side that allow an individual to be changed without fully undressing. These tabs also help with sizing as the product can be tightened or loosened as needed. The common downside to adult diapers is that they are not always the most discreet. Depending on your loved ones absorbency needs, a brief may be quite thick and/or bulky. Shop for adult diapers at <https://healthwick.ca/collections/incontinence-adult-diapers/>.

- **Absorbent Underwear** - Also known as pull-ups or incontinence underwear, absorbent underwear are a great option for those facing moderate to heavy urinary incontinence. They are also a good product to start with if your loved one isn't ready to try an adult diaper, as these pull-up underwear are worn like traditional underwear. Incontinence underwear typically offer less absorbency than a brief and are removed by tearing the side seams. Choosing the right size is very important with these underwear, as they do not have tabs that allow for adjusting the fit. Absorbent underwear, as they are not quite as absorbent as adult diapers, are thinner and therefore a more discreet option. Shop for absorbent underwear at <https://healthwick.ca/collections/incontinence-underwear>.

- **Incontinence Pads & Male Guards** - Much like a traditional menstrual pad, incontinence pads and male guards are an absorbent pad that is worn with regular underwear. Pads are a good option for those managing light to moderate bladder incontinence. While the concept is similar to a menstrual pad, incontinence pads offer a much higher absorbency and have odour eliminating properties. Male guards are incontinence pads that are designed specifically for the male anatomy. They are useful for men experiencing light urinary incontinence. Incontinence pads and male guards are available in a variety of sizes, absorbencies and shapes to suit different needs. Not all have an adhesive strip, as many are large enough to stay in place without needing one. Shop incontinence pads at <https://healthwick.ca/collections/incontinence-pads> and male guards at <https://healthwick.ca/collections/incontinence-male-guards>.



Other Things to Think About

Now that you're accomplished discussing incontinence with your loved one and their doctor, learned about continence issues and absorbent products, there are a few things still left to think about.

You may have already thought about how to protect bedding and furniture if your loved one experiences a leak, as having to replace these items can be expensive. Fortunately, there is a solution: underpads.

Underpads, as the name suggests, are absorbent pads that can be used to protect bedding and furniture. With disposable and washable options available in a variety of sizes and absorbencies, there is an option for every need. Simply place the underpad on your loved one's favourite chair or on top of their bedsheets at nighttime. The underpad will quickly absorb and fluids that it comes into contact with. Underpads have a waterproof backing to ensure that no liquid will pass through onto your furniture.

For those managing incontinence, skin care is something else to consider. If your loved one is wearing absorbent products to manage their continence issues, their skin will be in frequent contact with moisture from sweat, urine and possibly feces. The perianal skin (comprising roughly of the area that fits inside of your toilet seat when sitting down) is very delicate and can be prone to skin breakdown.

Soiled incontinence products should be changed promptly and that the perianal area is being properly cleansed. If your loved one is continually wearing soiled products, their skin will have moisture and bacteria trapped against it, which can cause further breakdown and irritation. Using specially formulated continence care products, like adult-size wipes/washcloths and perianal skin cleanser, will help to maintain good skin health. As these products are designed specifically for incontinence, the vast majority of these skin care products will be suitable for sensitive skin.



We're Here to Help
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