

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Incontinence: It Doesn't Have to be an Obstacle

Incontinence can be a source of tremendous embarrassment, and many older adults go to great lengths to prevent having others find out about their unintentional urine loss or leakage. But this condition shouldn't be kept a secret. If left untreated, incontinence can lead to additional health problems.

Many older adults experiencing incontinence fear their family members may view the condition as a sign that additional care giving will be needed—perhaps even a nursing home. But with the guidance of a doctor, incontinence can be successfully cured, treated and managed.

Types of Incontinence

Urinary incontinence is a symptom of something else going on in the body. It’s not a disease. There are different causes, related to various types of incontinence:

- **Stress incontinence.** Coughing, laughing or sneezing.
- **Urge incontinence.** Leakage when there is a strong desire to empty the bladder.
- **Overflow incontinence.** Leakage that occurs because the bladder doesn't empty completely.
- **Reflex incontinence.** Lacking the sensation to empty the bladder or having no control over the bladder.

There are also some physical conditions that may make urinary incontinence more probable in older adults. Such factors include:

- Multiple childbirths
- Structural abnormalities of the urinary tract
- Obesity or being overweight
- Bladder stones
- Menopause
- Chronic bladder or urinary tract infections
- Blockage of the bladder

How You Can Help

There are some methods you can try to help your loved one feel more comfortable at home, and make their incontinence more bearable. Try to:

- Be understanding. Remember that accidents are embarrassing.
- Communicate. Encourage your loved one to tell you when he or she needs to use the washroom.

© 2026 Morneau Shepell Ltd.

- Plan ahead to allow ample time for bathroom breaks.
- Adjust to their schedule.
- Simplify clothing, making it easy to remove and easy to clean.
- Suggest that your relative can help to control night incontinence by limiting their evening liquid intake.
- Help your loved one retain a sense of dignity, with reassurance and support.

Treatment

It's important that you seek medical advice from your doctor regarding professional treatment of incontinence and its symptoms. Your doctor may suggest:

- Behavioral techniques
- Medication
- Surgery

Incontinence can be an embarrassing and uncomfortable time for many older adults. This condition can also present great discomfort and many symptoms for its sufferers. Do your best to make your loved one more comfortable at home, and always be sure to seek the advice of a medical professional for additional guidance.