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## Managing Bladder Incontinence

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### What is bladder incontinence?

- Loss of bladder control causing loss of urine
- The problem has varying degrees of severity. Some people have only small leaks or dribbles of urine, while others lose large amounts of urine at a time.
- Bladder muscles and nerves as well as the brain all work together to control bladder function
  - A problem in any of these areas can result in incontinence
  - Infection, constipation and mobility problems can also cause incontinence
- Urine left on the skin can lead to irritation and odors

### What can I do to control urinary leakage?

- Establish a regular pattern of urinating
  - Plan to go to the toilet every two hours while awake and before bedtime
- Make it easier to get to the bathroom
  - Use a bedside commode, urinal or bedpan
- Protect your privacy and dignity
- Avoid fluids or foods that contain caffeine (soft drinks, coffee, tea or chocolate)
- Avoid alcohol as it can over stimulate the bladder
- Ask your nurse about
  - Exercises that can help develop more control
  - Medications that may help improve bladder function

## What can be done to prevent odor or skin irritation?

- Keep skin clean and dry
  - Take extra care to wash and dry the area
  - Products are available that can help you feel clean and eliminate odor
  - Use barrier creams to protect skin from urine
- Use protective products to try to keep clothing dry
  - Your nurse can help you select which type of garment and products would be most helpful for you
  - Change the garment frequently
- Wash your hands before and after care to prevent infection
- Ask your nurse for things that can further control any odors

## What to discuss with the hospice and palliative nurse?

- Changes in your bladder function
  - Burning, pain or discomfort with urination
  - Changes in the amount, frequency, color or odor of urine
- Medications
  - Many medications can cause incontinence
- Skin irritation

Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at [www.HPNA.org](http://www.HPNA.org).

### Reference

*Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2011.*

*Hospice and Palliative Nursing Assistant Core Curriculum, Pittsburgh, PA: Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association; 2009.*

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