

Incontinence in focus this week

This week (22-28 June 2015) is World Continence Week, which focuses on the global health issue that is estimated to affect an estimated 7.6-million South Africans - one in four women and one in eight men.



The theme of the 7th annual international awareness week is 'Family & Friend Carers' and focusses on those who take care of their loved ones who are experiencing some level of incontinence, such as ageing parents, spouse after a stroke or paraplegic child etc.

Caring for a loved one with incontinence can be a difficult choice, fraught with emotions that range from love and satisfaction to resentment, guilt, stress, anger and exhaustion. Many carers find their own health suffers because of having to lift and change their loved ones, or that their own activities are curtailed because they need to be on call to assist.

Eight strategies for coping

1. Keep up to date with developments in purpose-made incontinence products, as brands such as TENA are constantly looking for ways to make these products more effective for those who have incontinence, as well as practical, cost-effective and easy for caregivers to use. Using the right product can mean fewer changes and less product used.
2. Remember that choosing the right product is important, because there are products that incontinence sufferers can put on themselves. This eases your load and gives them more control of their life and increased dignity, so it is a win-win.

3. Ask for help - you do not have to do everything yourself, and you need some time off to ensure you do not burn out. Family members could help with basic household chores - you can even draw up a simple roster with a list of tasks. The help does not need to be directly related to the person you are caring for - it can cover simple tasks such as grocery shopping, cleaning the house or mowing the lawn.
4. Remember that there are highs and lows in caring for a loved one with incontinence. Sharing them - good and bad - will help and encourage others in a similar situation and enable you to retain a sense of balance.
5. The person you are caring for may become frustrated and take it out on you. If so, remember that it is not about you at all - he or she is in a very difficult, very challenging place. Try to direct your anger at the medical condition rather than the human being trying to cope with it.
6. Put your own health first, because you cannot take care of someone else if you are not in good health yourself. Eat regularly and healthily, take some time to exercise, and get enough sleep.
7. Get in touch with other caregivers, because even if there are no formal support groups, you do need support - and you need it from people who know exactly what you are going through. In addition, you can share ideas and advice from your own experience, and help each other with the practicalities of caregiving.
8. Ask a clinic nurse for help with finding the right product. The company has trained the sisters in Dis-Chem and PnP Pharmacies to give the right advice. The cheapest brands may not be the most economical - one caregiver of a stroke patient saved R5,000 a month, because at the outset, their loved one was bedridden and needed a night nurse. With rehab and reassessing the incontinence needs, they have gone to no night nurse and changed from products.

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