

Urinary Problems

What is happening

Urinary problems are very common in serious illness and near the end of life.

These problems may involve:

- Difficulty urinating
- Loss of bladder control
- Infections
- Catheter problems
- Changes in urine amount or appearance

Supplies that may help

Helpful supplies may include:

- Adult diapers or protective briefs
- Bedside commode
- Cleansing wipes or sanitary cloths
- Catheter supplies (if a catheter is present)

Ask the hospice team for guidance on:

- Proper use
- Cleaning
- Disposal of supplies

Common urinary problems

Urinary tract infection (UTI)

What you may see

- Cloudy or foul-smelling urine
- Pain or burning with urination
- Fever
- Increased confusion or agitation
- Sometimes blood in the urine

Why it may happen

- Weakened immune system

- Catheter use
- Urinary retention

Urinary retention (difficulty emptying the bladder)

What you may see

- Very small amounts of urine
- Frequent attempts to urinate
- New leakage or incontinence
- Lower abdominal or pelvic discomfort
- Little or no urine draining into a catheter bag

Common causes

- Medications
- Enlarged prostate (in men)
- Infection
- Kidney or bladder stones
- Severe constipation

A catheter may also become:

- Kinked
- Blocked
- Not draining properly

Urinary incontinence (loss of bladder control)

What you may see

- Wet clothing or bedding
- Sudden leakage of urine

Common causes

- Urinary tract infection
- Retention causing overflow leakage
- Water pills (especially at night)
- Increased fluid intake
- Constipation
- Stroke or other neurologic changes

What you can do

- Make sure catheter tubing is not kinked or blocked

- Check whether medications may be contributing
- Review fluid intake if instructed by the hospice team
- Ask about recent bowel movements, since constipation can worsen urinary problems
- Keep the skin clean and dry to prevent irritation

Talk with the hospice team about:

- Any new symptoms
- Concerns about medications
- Catheter problems

When to call hospice

- Pain with urination or pelvic pain
- Blood in the urine
- No urine for more than 8 hours
- Fever
- Increasing confusion or agitation
- Catheter not draining properly
- Sudden worsening of symptoms