

Clothing Ideas for People with Incontinence

This fact sheet is intended to offer some clothing ideas that may help people with incontinence and/or their caregivers to manage this physical problem more easily.

Incontinence, or lack of voluntary control of bladder or bowel, may affect people of all ages. It may be a temporary or a permanent condition that must be “lived with.” When incontinence occurs, you should consult a physician to find out if medical treatment can solve the problem. It may be caused by child-birth or various illnesses and accidents that affect the bladder, bowel, uterus, prostate, or spinal cord.

Many people with incontinence continue to work, travel, and participate in their usual activities and daily routine. Nevertheless, a person experiencing this problem for the first time may worry about an “accident” and be reluctant to venture far from home. No one should feel embarrassed about seeking advice about protection so they can avoid soiling clothing, furniture, car seats, or floor coverings.

Caregivers of incontinent persons will have cleanup tasks including clothing, bedding, and household furnishings that will require patience and knowledge about how to maintain sanitary standards.

Personal protection

Loss of bladder or bowel control may be managed in various ways. Today's consumer market offers a wide variety of personal protection products designed for children and adults of both sexes that not only absorb urine or hold waste, but also control odor. Well known brands of adult disposables are Attends®, Depends®, and Promise®. Reusable (washable) absorbent form-fitted diapers and undergarments also are available.

In some cases, incontinence is managed by placement of a catheter in the bladder with a tube that drains into a bag that is carried against the body or leg. Men may be fitted with an external condom-type device that collects urine, draining it into a leg bag. The wearer or a caregiver must empty or replace the bag at intervals.

Cancer or Chron's disease may require colostomy or ileostomy, a surgery that forms a new route for bowel movements. A colostomy creates an opening in the abdomen to allow waste elimination directly from the large intestine into a collection pouch that a person wears.

An ileostomy has the same purpose but involves the small intestine so the waste is more fluid than solid. In

either case, protective clothing that makes the appliance easily accessible is necessary because the bag must be emptied by the wearer or caregiver.

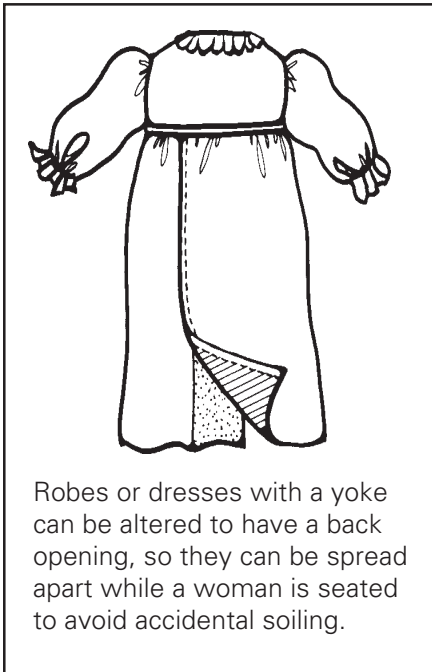
Clothing ideas

Look for the following clothing features.

- Mix and match separates allow a quick change if the bottom garment is soiled.
- Fabrics that are opaque, have some thickness, and/or body help conceal the use of disposables or collection bags.
- Clothing fabrics should be both washable and durable enough to last through frequent washing.
- Full-cut, softly pleated, or draped designs in skirts will provide room for disposable pads, undergarments, or collection bags, if they are required.
- Pants that have wide legs, full-cut, and waist elastic or pleated designs will offer needed room.
- Tops (jackets, shirts, sweaters) should be short in length to avoid becoming soiled.
- Open-front or wrap styles are easier to get on and off if soiled.
- Attractive collars, scarves, jewelry, or other design features close to the neckline keep attention focused on the individual's face.
- Shoulder bags, back packs, or tote bags can stow extra disposable undergarments and baby wipes for quick cleanup while out and about.

Clothing especially for wheelchair users

- A lap quilt or "throw" can provide warmth and design interest. Be sure that it is tucked so that it does not drag or become entangled in the wheels.
- Undergarments in addition to the diaper are unnecessary for wheelchair users or the bedfast.
- Soft sweaters, front opening sweatshirts or quilted jackets provide warmth for persons confined to bed or wheel-chairs.



Robes or dresses with a yoke can be altered to have a back opening, so they can be spread apart while a woman is seated to avoid accidental soiling.

- The back of the skirt or pants can be cut away so that it is not in the way of toileting or changing. Another design shown below will spread apart under a person who is seated, but will hang closed when the person stands.

- A garment design that spreads open in the seat is less likely to get soiled if there is an accident. These are available from mail order catalogs or can be constructed by a skilled sewer from garments already owned.
- Wide-leg pants for men with a "drop front" are commercially available so that bags can be more easily changed.

Footwear

- Select non-skid canvas or other footwear that can easily be washed and cleaned if wet or soiled by accident.
- Have a pair of dry shoes available in case the pair being worn gets soaked.
- For elderly persons, be sure the shoes can be fastened securely so that they do not slip off and cause a person to trip and fall; Velcro® closures may help.

Home management ideas

- Protect mattresses with plastic covers.
- Use waterproof pads or liners under the sheets in beds and on chairs.
- Use absorbent pads or terry towels over the waterproof liners on beds and chairs where the person's hips will rest.
- Manage odor problems by changing and washing protective covers when soiled.
- Use washable rugs beside the bed and in bathrooms in case of accidents.

Catalogs to check

- Buck & Buck Designs, 1-800-458-0600 — Back-opening and adaptive apparel for men and women.
- J.C. Penny 1-800-222-6161 — Incontinence protection, home health care supplies.
- National 1-800-480-4673 — Incontinence panties, mastectomy bras, women's apparel.
- Sears 1-800-326-1750 — Incontinence aids, health care supplies.

Useful WWW sites

- www.llmedico.com
- directmedicalinc.com
- www.adulthooddiapermagiced.com
- www.depend.com
- www.poise.com/incont_educ_cente/

No endorsement of products or firms mentioned is intended, nor is criticism implied of those not mentioned.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R. Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.