

Sharing Your Care - Aug 2018

A sudden personality change observed in a loved one can be caused by a variety of things; depression, pain, medications, and urinary tract infections (UTI) are a few of the most common causes. If your loved one has dementia, personality changes can also be one of the effects of the progression of the illness. In all instances, a sudden personality change can signal that something is happening and you should seek help from your loved one's primary care physician as soon as possible.

The most common illness we encounter at Project Independence is a urinary tract infection (UTI). It can be difficult to recognize a UTI in someone with a dementia related illness due to the fact that they may be unable to communicate what is happening or how they're feeling. One hint that something is going on is a change in normal behavior such as increased agitation, unsteadiness, anger, change in gait, paranoia or aggression. Other symptoms are: cloudy urine, a foul odor, fever, increased falls, more confusion and disorientation.

Risk of a UTI is higher in anyone with dementia, especially women

- Hygiene issues: People with dementia often use improper wiping techniques when using the bathroom, wiping back to front or not wiping at all. This increases the spread of bacteria.
- Incontinence: As dementia progresses, the ability to control bladder and bowel urges declines. Wearing adult incontinence pads/briefs can also add to the problem because, unless changed frequently.
- Reduced mobility: Decreased mobility due to advancing illness also increases the chance of UTI.
- Other conditions common in older adults can increase the possibility of an UTI: diabetes, prostate problems in men, weaker immune systems, etc.

Tips to Reduce the Chances of UTI

- Encourage adequate fluids
- Assist the person with dementia in cleaning themselves after urinating or a bowel movement.
- Encourage clothing that can breathe
- Encourage the person to urinate more often
- Change incontinence briefs/pads more often

UTI's are easily treatable; however the chance of a reoccurrence is high. We hope this information is useful to you as you navigate the always changing environment of being a caregiver. If you're looking for help/information on a particular topic, please email info@pibarre.giffordhealthcare.org and we'll research it for a future edition.