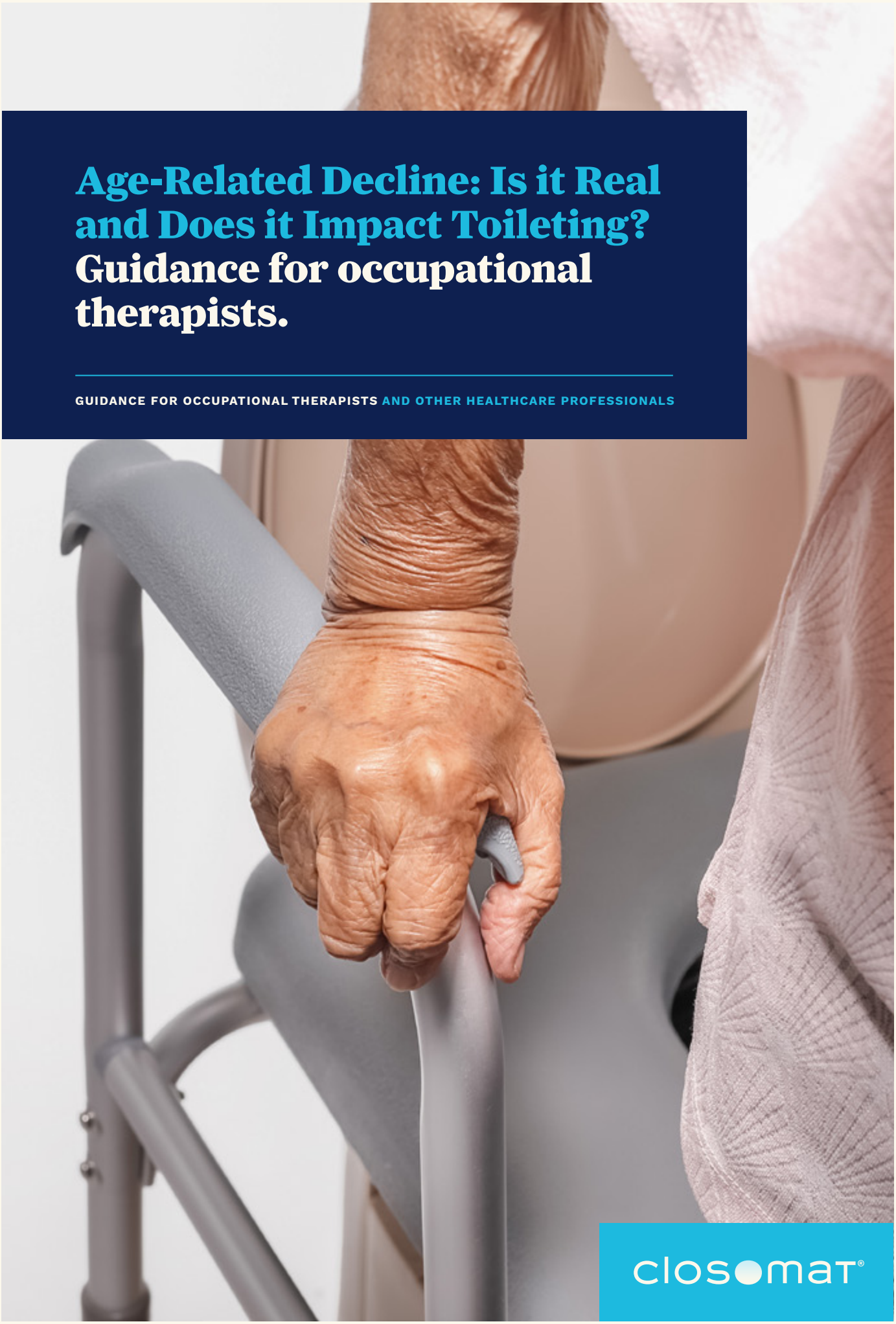


Age-Related Decline: Is it Real and Does it Impact Toileting? Guidance for occupational therapists.

GUIDANCE FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS AND OTHER HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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Age-related decline is not a subjective experience but a measurable physiological shift in "intrinsic capacity" and functional ability (Beard et al, 2016).



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ABSTRACT

As individuals age, the intersection of physical sarcopenia, cognitive shifts, and sensory changes creates a high-risk environment for one of the most private and frequent activities of daily living: toileting.

For occupational therapists, understanding the reality of this decline is essential for moving beyond reactive equipment provision toward preventative environmental design. This white paper examines the evidence for age-related decline, its specific impact on the toileting sequence, and the role of wash and dry toilets in maintaining independence, safety, and health system efficiency.

The Biology of Decline: More Than Just “Getting Older”.

The reality of age-related decline is rooted in significant physiological changes. Sarcopenia, the progressive loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength, directly impacts an individual’s ability to perform the physical manoeuvres required for safe toileting, such as controlled transfers and the manual dexterity needed for personal hygiene (Beard et al, 2016).



Furthermore, decline is often neurological. Research indicates that urinary urgency acts as a source of “divided attention,” which alters gait patterns and increases the risk of falls during the transition to the bathroom (Gibson, et al 2021). When combined with reduced shoulder range, grip strength, or the cognitive challenges of sequencing associated with dementia, the once-automatic task of toileting becomes a complex and hazardous hurdle (Featherstone et al, 2022; NIHR Evidence, 2022).

Activity Analysis: Where Decline Meets the Environment.

From an occupational therapy perspective, the impact of decline is most visible when the toileting sequence is broken down into its component parts:

Access → Transfer → Clothing management → Voiding → Cleansing → Drying → Hand hygiene.

Decline often manifests first in the “Cleansing” and “Drying” stages. As reach and dexterity diminish, individuals may struggle to wipe effectively, leading to:

Infection Risk: Poor hygiene and wiping direction (back-to-front) are major drivers of bacterial transfer and Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs), which account for nearly 190,000 hospital admissions annually in England (NIHR Evidence, 2022).

Occupational Disengagement: Repeated difficulty or “toileting failure” can lead to anxiety, avoidance, and a loss of confidence, resulting in a total withdrawal from independent toileting (Featherstone et al, 2022).

Loss of Dignity: The transition from independent hygiene to requiring a carer for intimate cleansing is a significant milestone in functional decline that profoundly impacts self-esteem (Royal College of Occupational Therapists, 2018; Royal Geriatrics Society, 2018).



The Risk Cascade: Falls, UTIs, and Hospitalisation.

The functional consequences of age-related decline are a leading cause of falls particularly during night-time toileting (Zou et al, 2023).



For older adults, particularly those over 70, a UTI is not merely a medical event; it often triggers a cascade of delirium, functional decline, and increased falls, which can lead to permanent loss of independence. OTs are often the first to see these functional markers of decline and are uniquely positioned to intervene through environmental adaptations.

Wash and Dry Toilets: A Clinical Tool for Independence.

Addressing age-related decline requires technology that compensates for lost physical and cognitive capacity. Wash and dry toilets provide a hands-free cleansing and drying solution that directly addresses the challenges identified in activity analysis:

- **Hygiene and Health: By replacing manual wiping with automated, vertical spray cleansing, these systems ensure more consistent hygiene and reduce the cross-contamination risks that lead to UTIs.**
- **Safety and Energy Conservation: Eliminating the need for complex twisting and reaching during cleansing reduces the risk of balance loss and preserves energy for other daily tasks.**
- **Carer Burden: Automated bidet interventions have been shown to significantly decrease the burden on family and professional carers, allowing the older adult to maintain privacy in their most intimate routines.**



The Professional and Economic Case for Intervention.

Occupational therapists must navigate the Mental Capacity Act 2005 to ensure choices reflect the individual's "best interests" while enabling "positive risk-taking" to support life at home.

The financial case for such interventions is robust. Preventative housing adaptations, such as the installation of specialist toilets via the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), offer a massive return on investment. Evidence suggests that for every £1 spent on such adaptations, approximately £7.50 is saved in wider health and social care costs by reducing hospital bed days and delaying the need for long-term residential care.

Summary.

Age-related decline is a measurable reality that specifically targets the complex sequence of toileting. By recognising the impact of sarcopenia, urgency-related gait changes, and reduced dexterity, OTs can specify solutions like wash and dry toilets that do not just “manage” decline but actively preserve independence. These adaptations represent a clinically sound, dignified, and cost-effective strategy for supporting the ageing population within their own homes.

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We're specialists in helping people with specific toileting needs.

We invented the Wash and Dry toilet over 60 years ago, and tens of thousands of people use our products every day to help them live their best lives. So we can say, with confidence, that we understand the needs of users better than any other manufacturer and we use this unrivalled knowledge to determine what is important (and what is not!).

We help OTs build specifications every day, and we can be there for you whether you need us on site with you to help determine the best possible solution for your client, or we can do this remotely, should access not be possible for clinical reasons.



Our products have been designed in consultation with healthcare professionals and have a range of clinical, health and well-being benefits.

We know that everyone is different, even if they have the same disability or condition. That's why we ensure our products are customisable in thousands of ways. This may seem complicated; but it isn't. It simply means that we can support you whatever your client's requirements are at the time of specification or into the future.



We're the only specialist UK-based manufacturer of Wash and Dry Toilets.

We have our own service team and our own engineers, meaning that we can ensure a consistent and expert back up service for our products, for you, and for your clients.

We understand that our products provide a much-valued level of independence, which is relied on every day. As such our in-house service team are on hand to maintain, repair and adapt your toilet for as long as your client needs it.



DESIGNED AND BUILT IN BRITAIN

We hope that you have found this white paper informative and that it has given you a good overview of what needs to be considered when you are building a specification for your clients with toileting needs.

This white paper is part of a series available at: closomat.co.uk.

In these white papers we've covered what you should keep in mind, with particular importance being given to the needs of the user.

If you require any further support, such as more detailed technical data, or help with specifications then please get in touch (details on the back page).


Understanding and specifying Wash and Dry Toilets. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Cerebral Palsy and accessibility. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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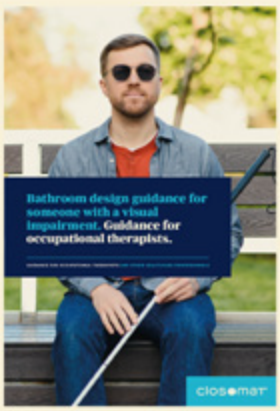

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Closomat Limited

Freephone: 0800 374 076
Telephone: 0161 969 1199

General Enquiries: info@closomat.co.uk
Sales Orders/Enquiries: sales@closomat.co.uk
Quotations/Pricing: quotations@closomat.co.uk

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