

Personal Care

Introduction

Personal care means providing care that is related to the patient's body, appearance, hygiene, and movement.

Tasks Related to Personal Care Include:

- Bathing
- Teeth and [mouth](#) care
- Dressing/grooming
- Toileting
- Eating
- Ambulation
- [Transferring](#)
- Care of the patient's environment
- Assisting with self-administration of medication

People may require personal care for a number of reasons. Assistance with personal care may be temporary while a person is recovering from an injury or illness or may be permanent, and is required for the remainder of their lives.

Providing personal care is a priority for the Home Health Aide/Personal Care Aide. It is the most important task they do. Personal care provision demonstrates to the patient concern about their physical health and general well-being.

This module will explore the importance of providing personal care and provide instruction with performing tasks related to personal care. The importance of [infection control](#) and how Home Health Aides/Personal Care Aides can work to break the [chain of infection](#) in order to keep patients healthy is discussed. Bathing, teeth/[mouth](#) care, dressing/grooming, toileting, and eating are topics discussed with explanation on how Home Health Aides/Personal Care Aides can provide assistance with these types of personal care.

Procedure: Tub or Shower Bath

- Ensure that the bathroom is warm and comfortable. Take care it is not too cold or too hot
- Remove any fall risk hazards, such as loose rugs, from the floor.
- Allow the patient to test the water temperature for their comfort. Adjust as needed.
- Assist the patient to the bathroom. If the patient is ambulatory, assist the patient as needed to undress and then [transfer](#) them into the tub or shower. Undress the patient immediately before getting them into the shower or tub. This prevents them from chilling.
- Never let a weak person stand to bathe or leave them in the bath alone. You can stay in the bathroom and draw the shower curtain to provide privacy. Communicate with them frequently to let them know you are there to provide assistance.
- Water should be turned off and the tub drained before assisting the patient to [transfer](#) out of the tub.

Teeth & Mouth Care

Performing or assisting with [mouth](#) hygiene is an important task of the Home Health Aide/Personal Care Aide. Mouth hygiene should be performed at least twice per day, with morning and evening care. Mouth hygiene may also be performed after eating meals and any time the patient requests. Regular, daily flossing helps to remove plaque and food debris which promotes bacteria, from the patient's mouth. Unclean mouths harbor bacteria, which can cause additional health problems for the patient. Having a clean mouth promotes a sense of comfort and [self-esteem](#) for a patient.

Procedure: Patients Who Can Brush Their Own Teeth or Need Some Assistance

- Explain the procedure to patient. Provide for privacy.
- Wash and dry hands. Always wear gloves when providing [mouth](#) care.
- Assemble equipment ([emesis basin](#), water, cup, toothbrush, toothpaste, mouthwash, and a towel).
- Ensure the patient is in an upright position for safety. A high sitting position prevents [choking](#) or [aspiration](#).
- If the patient is able to brush their own teeth, provide equipment and assist as needed.
- Wet toothbrush, apply a small amount of toothpaste to the bristles on the brush.
- Hold the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle to the gum line. Brush one tooth at a time in an up and down motion. Start from the top of the gum line and work down the tooth. Start at the upper teeth and then complete the lower teeth.
- To clean biting surfaces of teeth and the tongue, use a back and forth motion.
- Be sure to brush all surfaces of the teeth, gums, tongue, and mouth.
- Ensure the patient adequately rinses their mouth with clean water and dries their lips/face.
- Offer mouthwash and lip moisturizer as needed and according to patient preferences.

Denture Care

- Carefully place dentures in a water filled cup or container.
- Carry the dentures to the sink using a denture cup to prevent accidental breakage.
- Place a towel in the sink to prevent accidentally breaking dentures on the hard surface of the sink while you are washing them. Hold them firmly.
- Clean dentures as you would teeth. Use denture cleaning products. Use warm, but not hot water. Hot water can cause dentures to warp and no longer fit the patient correctly. Rinse dentures completely.

Dressing & Grooming

Providing assistance with dressing and grooming is an important task of the Home Health Aide/Personal Care Aide. Maintaining a person's appearance is important especially during times of illness. It helps people to feel more like themselves and helps the patient appear familiar to family, which is important during times of stress and illness. Patients, especially those with conditions such as [diabetes](#) in which there is poor circulation to the feet, should have their feet inspected daily. Any red, open, bleeding, or problematic conditions should be reported to the supervisor. This section provides instruction about how to assist with patient dressing, apply [compression stockings](#), provide hand and foot care, and shave a patient. Complete these tasks as directed by the Care Plan. Keep in mind patient preferences and respect the patient's wishes.

Assisting with Dressing

- Some patients may be able to independently dress. For these patients, provide assistance only as needed. Home Health Aides/Personal Care Aides should encourage their patients to do as much as possible on their own. Other patients may need extensive assistance with dressing. In order to promote [self-esteem](#) and empower in patients, allow them to select the clothing they prefer.
- Allow the patient to select clothing they wish to wear.
- Assemble clothing in the order it is to be put on. Clothing for the upper body should be put on before pants/skirts, which should be put on before socks and shoes.
- Ensure the patient's clothing is clean and in good condition. Clothing should be appropriate to the weather.
- It may be helpful for the patient to wear clothing that is easier for them to put on independently. For example, pants without buttons or zippers can easily be pulled on; shirts with few buttons are easier to close; sneakers with Velcro versus laces and slip on shoes all may be helpful for patients who have difficulty with their fine motor coordination or finger dexterity.
- Encourage the patient to do as much self-dressing as possible. Assist if they become fatigued, frustrated or are unable to perform the task.

Assisting with Eating

Home Health Aides/Personal Care Aides can provide an atmosphere that is pleasant during meal time. Ensure there are no unpleasant odors. Empty trash cans, and remove [urinals](#) and [bedpans](#) from sight. Offer to assist the patient to the bathroom and to perform [mouth](#) care prior to eating. Ensure patients who wear dentures place them in their mouths prior to eating. This allows the patient to better chew and digest their food.

Patients should always be positioned in an upright position during mealtimes. This helps to prevent [choking](#). For patients who have swallowing or choking problems, they should be kept in an upright position for 30-60 minutes once their meal is complete.

Patients with [visual impairments](#) may need to be instructed about the position of food on their plate. An easy way to do this is to use the [clock method](#). Instruct patients about position of food using the face of a clock as a guide. For example, “The peas are at 2:00, the meatloaf is at 6:00 and the rice is at 9:00.”

Some patients may only need assistance with preparing food and are able to eat independently. Many types of adaptive equipment such as special plates, cups, and eating utensils are available to help people be as independent as possible while eating. Other patients will require [complete care](#) during eating and the Home Health Aide/Personal Care Aide will need to feed the patient. HHAs/PCAs should sit next to patients while feeding and offer to keep those who are independent eaters company. Mealtime is a good time to get to know the patient. Patients who prefer to pray or have religious or spiritual practices prior to meals should be allowed to practice these rituals. Give privacy as appropriate and requested.

Home Health Aides/Personal Care Aides should offer foods that are appealing to their patient and allow them to choose the foods they would like to eat, as appropriate.

Assisting with Eating

- Inform the patient that it is mealtime. Provide choices about foods.
- Always wash and dry your hands. Always apply gloves during meal preparation and when assisting with eating.
- Assemble equipment needed (e.g. bowl, plates, cup, eating utensils, napkins).
- Allow the patient to select foods they prefer.

- Prepare the patient's environment by ensuring there are no unpleasant odors or sights.
- Offer mouth care prior to eating. Assist with applying dentures. This allows a patient to be able to effectively chew their food. Assist or encourage the patient to put on glasses so they may see their food.
- Position the patient in a high upright sitting position. This will prevent the patient from [choking](#) or aspirating food or fluids.
- Allow the patient time to pray before eating if they wish.
- Arrange food attractively on the plate.
- Encourage the patient to do as much as they are capable. Assist only as needed.
- Cut food into small, bite-sized pieces if patient is unable to do so.
- Place a napkin under the patient's chin. Replace soiled napkins as needed.
- Inform the patient of food temperatures, especially for food that is hot.
- Use forks and spoons gently when feeding the patient. Never force feed a patient.
- Allow adequate time between bites before offering the next bite.
- Encourage the patient to chew food well before proceeding to taking the next bite.

