

Personal Care:

Grooming And Dressing

Helping someone bathe, dress, shave, and perform other personal activities can be difficult. Knowing how to handle these delicate situations will make things easier for both you and your loved one.

Bathing

Bathing can be a very pleasant part of the day. After a bath we feel good, clean and relaxed. If you care for someone who needs help with bathing, keep things as pleasant and relaxed as possible. You'll both feel a lot better afterwards.

If the person needs more than a little help with bathing, ask your doctor about having a professional caregiver come to your home and show you how to make the job easier and safer. Home health aides, nurses and therapists provide this kind of service.

General Tips for Bathing

Encourage the person to bathe herself as much as possible. She may be able to do all but wash her feet or back, or she may only be able to hold a washcloth while you do the rest.

- If bathing is difficult, do it only as often as necessary.
- Most people don't need a daily bath. Do make sure that the hands, face, and genital area are washed every day.
- Have all supplies ready before starting a bath.
- Keep the room comfortably warm.
- Respect the person's privacy. Keep her covered when possible.
- Wear latex gloves any time that you may come into contact with bodily fluids or feces.

If The Person Is Able to Get Into A Tub Or Shower:

- Install grab bars.
- Use a non-slip bath mat.
- Ask her to sit on the edge of the tub. Then put both of her legs into the tub before she stands up.
- Reverse the process when she's getting out.

If The Person Can't Sit Down into The Tub:

- Buy or rent a tub bench.
- Install a hand-held shower attachment.

Bed Baths

Giving a bed bath requires skill, but many family caregivers are able to provide this care. If the person is bed or wheelchair-bound, ask your doctor about getting a home health aide to come into the home to bathe the person. Or a trained caregiver may be able to teach you how to give a bed bath. Medicare or Medicaid may cover the costs of help with bed baths. Ask the doctor about this.

Skin Care

People who are ill or who must stay in bed or in a wheelchair are at risk for pressure ulcers, sometimes called bed sores. Pressure ulcers are a serious problem, but in most cases they can be prevented by following the steps listed here.

- Make sure the person is eating a healthy diet and getting plenty of fluids. Well-nourished skin is healthier and less likely to break down.
- Keep the skin clean and dry.
- Clean off urine or feces immediately with soap and water. Wear disposable latex gloves.
- Use disposable bed pads to keep the linen dry, if the person is incontinent. If eligible for Medicaid, Medicaid will pay for incontinence supplies; ask your physician for a prescription. Be sure the pharmacy you use will accept Medicaid payment for supplies.
- Check the skin regularly for red areas. Make this a routine part of bath time.
- Every 2 hours change the position of a person who is bed or wheelchair-bound.
- Avoid dragging the person when you move them in bed. Friction can cause skin breakdown.
- Apply lotion to dry skin regularly (except between the toes where it can cause fungal growth.) Give a light massage while rubbing in the lotion.
- If eligible for Medicaid, Medicaid may cover the cost of appliances with a doctor's prescription. Be sure to ask.

If A Red Area Develops on The Skin:

- Remove pressure from the area immediately.
- Clean and dry areas soiled with urine or feces. Wear disposable latex gloves.
- Do not massage the area.
- Recheck the skin in 15 minutes. If the redness is gone, no other action is needed.
- If the redness does not disappear after 15 minutes, consult your health care professional about better ways to relieve pressure from the skin.
- If a blister or open area develops, contact your health care professional immediately.

Shaving

- Use an electric shaver when shaving another person; it's safer and easier.
- Put dentures in the person's mouth before shaving him.
- Have him in a sitting position if possible.

Mouth Care

- Clean teeth at least once a day.
- Check dentures regularly for cracks.
- Remove dentures for cleaning and store in liquid when out of the mouth.
- Have dentures checked if they aren't fitting properly (a common cause of eating problems).

Dressing

- Be flexible. Wearing a bra or pantyhose may not be important to her, especially if it's an added hassle.
- Allow enough time for the person to do as much as she can for herself. If she can put clothing on but only needs help for buttons or shoes, give her time to do it.
- Let the person choose what to wear. You can lay out two choices to simplify this for someone who is confused.
- Be sure shoes or slippers are well-fitting and do not have gum soles, which can cause people to trip.
- Consider easy-to-use clothes with large front fasteners (zippers or Velcro,) elastic waistbands and slip-on shoes. This type of clothing is available through health product catalogs like Sears or J. C. Penney.
- To minimize the stress on a person's weak side, put the painful or weak arm into a shirt, pullover or jacket before the strong arm. When taking them off, take out the strong arm first.

Hair Care

Getting out to a barbershop or beauty shop is enjoyable for many people who are ill or disabled. If possible, it's often worth the extra effort to take the person out for a haircut or shampoo. Many shops will make a special effort to meet the client's needs, especially if they know the client or family. Beauty schools may do hair care for no or low cost, as a way for students to get experience. You may also be able to find someone to come into the home. Try calling a local nursing home for the name of someone who makes home visits. Or place an ad in a church or other community bulletin board for what you need.

Hair Care Tips

- Keep hair short and in an easy-care style.
- Wash hair in the kitchen sink if the tub or shower is too difficult.
- Consider using one of the dry shampoo products found in drug stores if hair washing is impossible.
- If hair must be washed in bed, you can make a simple device to catch the water by making a U-shaped towel pad and putting it inside a large plastic bag. Place the open end of the U over the edge of the bed where it can drain into a bucket.