

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Battle of the Bath

Bathing and Pericare

Bathing is often called the most challenging activity for both the person with dementia and the caregiver. What a shame that the idea of relaxing in a warm tub filled with bubbles rarely matches the typical caregiver-care receiver experience. Standing naked, afraid of falling, in a room that may be drafty, with water coming from all kinds of unexpected places, may result in pain, fatigue, weakness, confusion, and anxiety for the person with Alzheimer's disease.



Tip If “bath” is a bad word, try saying, “Let’s get ready for the day (or night).”

Make bathing easier and more pleasant—

- **Let the person feel in control.** Does the person prefer showers, a tub bath, and at what time of day?
- **Create a safe atmosphere.** Put non-slip adhesives on the floor and bottom of tub, install grab bars to prevent falls, test the water temperature in advance and use a bath bench.
- **Respect the person's dignity.** Allow the person to keep a towel around him or her in and out of the shower or tub.

- **Don't worry about *daily* baths.** It doesn't have to be done every day. Sponge baths can be used in between showers and baths.
- **Be gentle.** The person's skin may be sensitive. Avoid scrubbing. Pat dry, Use lotion.
- **Be flexible.** If the person does not want a shampoo use a wash cloth to soap and rinse the hair. Or, use a shampoo in a cap or substitute a no rinse shampoo for a regular shampoo.

Talk with the person, tell him what you are going to do next, encourage him to wash areas that he can and watch that the flow of water is not too strong.

A person can also be washed in his room in bed, if showers or baths are not comfortable or practical.

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Bed Bath and Peri Care

To avoid spreading germs, always wash your own hands before and after giving a bath. At each step, tell the person what you are about to do and ask for his or her help if they are able. Always start washing at the cleanest part and work toward the dirtiest part.

1. Make sure the room is a comfortable temperature and not too warm.
2. Gather supplies—disposable gloves, mild soap, washcloth, dry towel, washbasin, lotion, comb, electric razor, shampoo, and clean clothes.
3. Use good body mechanics (position)—keep your feet separated, stand firmly, bend your knees, and keep your back in a neutral position.
4. Offer the bedpan or urinal.
5. If you have a hospital bed, raise the bed to its highest level and bring the head of the bed to an upright position.
6. Help with oral hygiene—brushing the teeth or cleansing the mouth.
7. Test the temperature of the water in the basin with your hand.
8. Remove the person's clothes, the blanket, and the top sheet. Cover the person with a towel or light blanket. Keep all of the body covered during the bed bath, uncovering only one area at a time while washing it.
9. Now, have the person lie almost flat.
10. Use one washcloth for soap, one for rinsing, and a dry towel. Have the washcloth very damp, but not dripping.
11. Very gently wash the face and neck; pat dry.
12. Wash the chest and, for females, under the breasts; pat dry.
13. Wash the stomach and upper thighs; pat dry.
14. Wash upward from wrist to upper arm to increase circulation; pat dry.
15. Wash the hands and between the fingers; check the nails; pat dry.
16. Place a towel under the person's buttocks.
17. Flex (bend) the person's knees; wash the legs; pat dry.
18. Wash the feet and between the toes and dry well. Use lotion on dry feet.
19. Wash the pubic area. If possible, have the person wash his or her own genitals; if not, do it yourself. (Use PeriWash to prevent a buildup of germs.)
20. If a male is not circumcised, draw back the foreskin, rinse, dry, and bring the foreskin down over the head of the penis again. Watch for unusual tenderness, swelling, or hardness in the testicles. For the female, wash the genitals thoroughly by spreading the external folds. Pat dry. (This must be done at least daily.)
21. Change the bath water.
22. Roll the person away from you; tuck a towel under the person.
23. Wash the back from the neck to the buttocks; rinse and pat dry.
24. Give a back rub with lotion to improve circulation.
25. Dress the person; trim nails if needed.
26. Change the bed linens.

Taking Care of Yourself—How to Show Gratitude

The holidays are especially a time for gratitude, and there are many ways, without spending money, to express a heartfelt “thank you” to people who make your life a little bit better:

- ✈ Make a referral as an affirmation of your appreciation for a professional service.
- ✈ Use hand-written “thank you” notes.
- ✈ Convey your gratitude with a tasty culinary creation like a cake.
- ✈ Pass on a good deed to other people to pass on kind favors done to you.
- ✈ Spend quality time with friends to show you value their relationship.
- ✈ Make a public announcement of your appreciation to someone.
- ✈ Add a little creativity in saying thank you to surprise the recipient.



Inspiration

Stress is a disease cured by human connection.

Live Life Laughing!

Sure I've got the holiday spirit, cranky and exhausted.



Don't Fall – Be Safe

Falls often occur as people get in or out of the tub. Non-slip, suction mats or rubber silicone appliques in the tub will help prevent falls.

A non-skid, latex-coated bath mat on the floor beside the tub provides firm footing.

Grab bars around the bathtub should be installed according to the manufacturer's directions for firm, solid support. Under no circumstance should towel rods be used as bathtub aids. They will not support a person who loses balance.

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To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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SAFETY TIPS—Types of Baths

- ★ **Bed bath**—this may be useful if the person must stay in bed. This is also a good time to check for skin conditions such as bedsores or rashes. In the advanced stage of dementia, bed or sponge baths may be the only choices you have.
- ★ **Basin bath**—if the person is in a chair or wheelchair, you can give a sponge bath at the sink.
- ★ **Tub bath**—use if the person has good mobility and is strong enough to get into and out of the tub. Be careful—tubs can be dangerous if a person has problems with balance.
- ★ **Shower**—make sure the floor is not slippery; let the person smell soap and feel a towel if he does not understand; make sure the room is warm.

NOTE

For a person with dementia, removing clothes can be frightening or painful and cause a feeling of loss. Don't rush.

NEXT ISSUE... STANDARD PRECAUTIONS – REDUCE THE RISK OF COMMON INFECTIONS