

Hygiene

Day-to-day tasks like washing, brushing our teeth and going to the toilet help keep us healthy and comfortable. But if someone you care about lives with dementia, they might find it hard to maintain their personal hygiene.

Here are some ways to help. These are intimate and sometimes embarrassing tasks, though, so they might need time to adjust. Stay calm and patient, and offer reassurance as you go.

Supporting personal care

We all have our own preferences and habits when it comes to our personal care. For example, you might like to have a shower before you go to bed each night, but dislike baths. Ask your loved one about their routine and try to continue it, even if their habits are different to yours.

Encourage the person to do as much as they can themselves. These can be complex activities with multiple steps, so you might need to support them through the process. You can:

break down the tasks into simple steps and go one at a time

explain each step using simple, respectful language

offer clear questions with limited options, like “Would you like to have a bath or a shower?” or “Would you like to have your bath now or before bed?”

lay out the equipment for the task in the order that they’ll be used: for a shower, lay out the soap, face washer, towel and then clean clothes.

Washing, baths and showers

Bathing can be a particularly tricky task for someone living with dementia. They might:

feel embarrassed about undressing in front of someone else, particularly if they’re experiencing incontinence

find the room too hot or cold, too bright or dark

feel water temperature and the sensation of running water differently than they used to

feel scared: of falls, deep water, the intense physical sensations involved, or something else.

These are some things you can try.

Provide privacy

Make sure they're comfortable with you being there. Ask them how they're feeling and what support they need.

Pull down the room's blinds or close curtains and doors.

Cover any mirrors if they don't recognise themselves.

Create a comfortable environment

Ask your friend or family member whether the bathroom temperature is too warm or too cold.

Check that the lighting is bright enough, particularly at night.

Let the person feel the water temperature before their bath or shower. Sometimes gently pouring water over their hands or your own hands is reassuring, letting them know that it's not too hot.

Play soft background music, as this might be calming and relaxing.

Address any fears

If they're having a bath, run it ahead of time. Check the water level. Some people prefer a shallow bath, while others prefer a deep bath.

Install handrails and a hand-held shower head to make bathing safer and easier. You could also use a shower seat or bath seat.

If hair washing is upsetting for them, separate it from bathing.

You could try visiting a hairdresser or asking a hairdresser to come to the house, if this is something they enjoy.

Try washing from a basin, rather than a bath or shower.

Going to the toilet

If your loved one needs help going to the toilet, make sure they're clean and dry, and they change their underwear when they need to.

For more on this, see our [Continence](#) page.

Shaving

If your loved one is used to shaving, consider encouraging them to use an electric razor, as this is safer than a traditional razor. If they use a traditional razor and start cutting themselves, you may need to help them.

Cleaning teeth

You might need to remind your friend or family member to clean their teeth or dentures, or you might need to brush them for them.

For more on this, see our [Dental Care](#) page.

Cutting and cleaning nails

Uncut nails can cause problems, but your loved one might forget to cut them or may find it difficult. These are some things you can try:

Ask if you can cut the nails for them.

Make an appointment to visit a podiatrist.

Organise a professional manicure if it's something they enjoy.

Changing clothes

Clean clothes help with hygiene and freshness, but dementia can affect someone's ability to dress and undress themselves.

For more on this, see our [Getting Dressed](#) page.