

Tips for Helping with Bathing and Grooming

Accepting help with bathing and grooming is one of the biggest challenges for people with dementia. It is often uncomfortable and stressful for caregivers, too. Here are some ideas for making bathing and grooming a little easier.

Find a way to start from a calm place. Plan to allow plenty of time so that you don't have to rush. Before introducing any bathing or grooming tasks, try to connect with the person by talking about something pleasant or funny. Avoid drawing attention to the fact that the person needs help to preserve their sense of dignity. Use a respectful, matter-of-fact tone of voice to help you both feel more at ease. Keep a predictable schedule or routine for bathing and grooming. Support the person to do as much as they can without getting frustrated. Apologize when things get especially difficult or frustrating even though you may be doing your best. Celebrate once the hard part is over; laugh, congratulate yourselves, or enjoy an activity or treat together. This will help the person forget any unpleasantness. Below are more ideas for responding to specific problems.

IF	THEN
The person is upset or irritable	<p>Try using the following strategies to help them feel calm before you start personal care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease sensory input <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Reduce noise level (close the door, turn off the television, etc.) ◦ Dim lights and lower blinds (but make sure there is enough light for the task at hand) • Apologize and offer reassurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>"It's okay, we can handle this."</i> ◦ <i>"I am sorry, I know this is uncomfortable. I will be gentle."</i> ◦ <i>"You will feel so much better when we are done."</i> ◦ <i>"Gosh darn, I don't like this part either, but I think we can do it!"</i> • Provide distractions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Talk about something pleasant, for example, the weather, a fun fact, a humorous story, or a fond memory ◦ Give them something comforting to hold, like a soft blanket, a stuffed animal, or other preferred item

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sing or hum a favorite song or play background music • Follow familiar habits around bathing and grooming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, if they usually brush their teeth or shave before bathing, help them keep that routine • Watch this video from the Conversations with Caregivers video series to learn ways to communicate with the person to avoid conflict. Playing Along: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-kLPLY-LEk
IF	THEN
The person refuses help with bathing or grooming	<p>Try different ways to introduce the task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find opportunities to ease into the task discreetly; for instance, if there is a spill or they get dirty, or when they have an outing or an appointment • Make it part of a regular routine; try using a calendar and writing the shower schedule down • Try first thing in the morning before they are fully oriented to their own agenda • Cheerfully offer limited options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>"Today is shower day! Would you like to shower now or after breakfast?"</i> ○ <i>"How about wearing this lovely green sweater today?"</i> ○ <i>"Let's wash up before we go to the movies."</i> • Set up the environment to prompt the person to do the activity themselves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Turn on the shower and set up a change of clothes in the bathroom and say, <i>"Your bath is ready, it's nice and warm, just the way you like it!"</i> ○ Set out pajamas in the evening and say, <i>"Time to put on your cozy, soft pajamas!"</i>

The person refuses help with bathing or grooming

Find out if the person might be refusing help because the task is physically painful:

- Observe for signs of pain (moaning, bracing, wincing)
- Ask, “*Does it hurt?*” when the person resists something
- If you think you see signs of pain, talk to the person’s doctor about it to see if medication would help

Watch this video from Conversations with Caregivers video series to learn ways to help a person with dementia with Dental Hygiene:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP8Kqa-JNg4>

IF

The person has difficulty following directions or doing grooming tasks

THEN

- Set up the environment
 - Clear any unneeded items away from the work area to avoid confusion
 - Arrange needed items in the order they will be used
 - Consider using a chair so the person can sit at the sink or in the shower
 - Watch these videos to learn about supplies and equipment that can help
 - i. Family Caregiver Alliance Caregiver College Video Series: Bathing and Dressing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvQtjY3-bcE>
 - ii. Family Caregiver Alliance Caregiver College Video Series: Dental Care
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFG1jtf6Zdg>
 - Keep some extra supplies nearby just in case the process gets messy, such as disposable gloves, a plastic garbage bag, and a towel
 - Watch this video from the Conversations with Caregivers video series to learn about ways to help make day-to-day activities go smoothly. Patience and Preparation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cQc7kACBHY

<p>The person has difficulty following directions or doing grooming tasks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the person what you want them to do; for example, pretend to brush your own teeth, pull up your pants, or comb your hair • Give the person simple 1–2 step directions, pause after each instruction, and talk them gently through the whole task (verbal cues) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>“Stand up.”</i> ◦ <i>“Hold this.”</i> ◦ <i>“Wash your face.”</i> • Watch this Teepa Snow video to see how to help the person with dementia do as much as they can for themselves. Living at Home with Mid to Later Stage Dementia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TuKZqcPenA • Watch this Teepa Snow video to learn how to help the person with hand-under-hand assistance. Bathing a person with dementia/Alzheimer’s: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxwJgDg3bYU&list=PL7B4EF8BBF5868559
IF	THEN
<p>The person is uncomfortable with the intimacy of allowing someone to help with bathing and grooming</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a matter-of-fact approach; avoid drawing attention to the fact that the person needs help • Support the person to do as much as they can for themselves • Pay attention to privacy; keep the person covered as much as possible: close curtains, window coverings, and doors • Talk the person through the process to help them feel safe, or distract them with small talk • Thank the person for helping