

Helping with Personal Cares

Please follow any care plans that are already in place for your consumers. This article is for additional helpful information only.

Personal Care Activities

Everyone has their own personal care routines, which include: eating, bathing, shaving, caring for the skin, hair and mouth, and transferring (moving from chairs, toilets or bed). Some of which are considered intimate and personal (toileting). During the course of our daily lives these activities are taken for granted until weakness or disability makes them difficult to accomplish independently or safely. Providing assistance requires knowledge, patience, skill and physical strength. Source: Torres-Stanovik, 1990.

First, and foremost, it is important to both you and your consumer, that you both recognize and understand the difference between *caring* and *doing*. As the caregiver, it is healthy to promote your consumer's independence, and allow him/her to participate in their own personal care, no matter how small the task. Be a caregiver helper, not a caregiver doer. A comfortable and relaxed environment will allow you and your consumer to talk about what he/she is unable to do, and what he/she would like you to do for him/her. If your consumer's assessment of his/her abilities is unrealistic, be honest. Allow your consumer to do as much as possible, with you providing only as much assistance as needed. Encouraging self-care will help promote a good sense of self, independence, and maintain strength. No matter how small the personal care activity is (combing hair, brushing teeth, holding the soap), it is important the consumer be able to participate. Be aware of changes in your consumer's health, if he/she is ill, stressed, or, tired, his/her abilities may change.

Bathing

A study of caregivers ranked bathing as the second most embarrassing task to perform in their care giving duties. They also ranked bathing as their number one time consuming tasks. And, bathing was the number one ranked most physically challenging task. Caregiver's greatest fear in bathing is that their loved one will fall or slip in the bathing routine.

Encourage self-care as long as possible. But, be realistic about the person's ability. For example, if your consumer has dementia, with dressing, as time goes on, the task may take longer and longer. Eventually you may need to select clothes and supervise what to do next.

Be prepared to supervise personal activities. For example, bathing may become difficult or dangerous for the individual to do alone. Consider how often bathing is necessary. It may be necessary to prompt the individual or to assist. Sensitivity to temperature declines as some diseases progress. Test the temperature of the water. As coordination and balance decline, judge whether the individual can safely use the bath or the shower if unaided.

If the individual balks at a planned activity, alternatives may be needed. For example, if possible, substitute a sponge bath for a shower or bath.

Bathing Tips:

- Bath time is frightening for many individuals and is the most frequent time for catastrophic reactions (angry out of control outbursts) to happen. The person may become confused and cannot manage independently, because he/she is embarrassed because they need help in a very personal way.
- Be very patient with the individual.
- Tell the person about the bath just before it is time.
- Have everything prepared ahead of time (soap, towels, shampoo, clean clothes, etc.).
- Water temperature should be monitored closely so that it is not too hot or too cold.
- If possible baths (only a few inches of water) are preferable to showers for many older adults. If a shower is inevitable, use a shower chair and a hand held showerhead.
- Have grab bars installed in the bathtub and bathroom to ensure the person's safety.
- Eliminate other safety hazards in the bathroom such as throw rugs or extra containers of shampoo, etc.
- It is often helpful to give the individual a bath mitt or a washcloth to hold. It may prevent the caregiver from being grabbed or hit.
- A warm bathrobe and cozy slippers are often helpful in the transition after the bath.
- Do not overdress, comfortable clothing is best and is more practicable.

Shampooing

Outings to the hairdresser or barber can be a very rewarding and positive experience for you and your consumer. If there is no way for you to visit the hairdresser or barber, check the *Yellow Pages* of your telephone book, or with family and friends, to find someone who might provide this service at your home. There are many 'new' dry shampoo products available if your consumer is bed bound, you may want to inquire with the physician, a pharmacist, or nurse, for their recommendation of products to use.

Shaving

It is much easier (and safer) to shave another person with an electric razor. Individuals who are diabetic or on anti-coagulants (such as Coumadin or other medications to thin the blood), should use an electric razor to reduce the risk of cuts and infection. If the consumer wears dentures, have them put them in their mouth before shaving him. Also, have him in a sitting position if possible. If your consumer can't shave on his/her own because of an unsteady hand, let him/her apply the lather and wash off with a cloth after he/she is shaved.

Source: Caregivers Handbook: <http://www.aasa.dshs.wa.gov/Library/caregiver.htm>

Skin Care

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

- 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, especially when people are having problems with bowel and bladder control. When washing, use a mild soap, rinse well, and dry thoroughly.
- Clean off urine or feces immediately with soap and water. Wear disposable latex gloves.
- Keep bed linens clean, dry and free of wrinkles. 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.
- Every 2 hours change the position of a person who is bed or wheelchair bound. Encourage the individual to shift his/her weight between position changes to redistribute pressure onto other areas. Use mattress and chairs that are soft and form fitting rather than rigid and hard. This spreads the weight over a larger skin area, decreasing the pressure under the bones.
- Encourage movement or mild exercise; this helps stimulate circulation, which is good for the skin. Combing hair and helping with bathing and dressing are good ways for frail people to get exercise and be more independent.
- Watch for possible sources of pressure on anything that would interfere with good circulation, such as tight shoes, elastic cuffed socks or tight undergarments.
- Bony prominences are prone to skin breakdown. They are heels, feet, behind the knees, hips, buttocks, sacrum, elbows and shoulder blades. A special air mattress may be ordered by the doctor to prevent skin breakdown.
- Watch for any redness or a break in the skin and report it immediately to the doctor or nurse, and keep the consumer off the affected side.
- 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 gentle massage using circular motion while rubbing in the lotion.
- Check the skin regularly for red areas. Make this a routine part of bath time.

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.

Source: Torres-Stanovik, 1990 <http://www.zarcrom.com/users/alzheimers/cgbook.html> and WSDSHS Caregiver's Handbook, available at: <http://www.aasa.dshs.wa.gov/Library/caregiver3.htm>

Oral Health Care

Good oral health care is imperative to good health.

- 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).

Source: WSDSHS Caregiver's Handbook, <http://www.aasa.dshs.wa.gov/Library/caregiver3.htm>

Dry or Sore Mouth

- Drink plenty of liquids,
- Suck on ice chips,
- Suck on Popsicles made of milk or non-acid juices,
- Dunk or soak foods in liquids,
- Use extra gravies, sauces, salad dressing,
- Rinse mouth frequently,
- Suck hard candies or chew gum,
- Eat sweet or tart foods if no sores in mouth,
- Artificial saliva can be used.

Dressing

Be flexible in choices of clothing. Consider clothes that are easy to clean. If your consumer needs assistance with dressing, consider easy-to-use clothes with front fasteners, elastic waistbands, and slip on shoes. Keep things as pleasant and relaxed as possible. Allow enough time for the person to do as much as he/she can do for himself/herself, which promotes independence and maintaining, or improving functioning. Such as, if he/she can put on clothing, but, only needs help with zippers or buttons, give them time to do what they can on their own. Allow your consumer to choose his/her own clothes. Ensure that footwear is well fitting. When assisting with clothing, arrange clothes with underwear on top, followed by pants, top, socks, and shoes. If you must assist with dressing, due to an illness or disability, to minimize the stress of an injury, guide the painful or weak limb into the shirt or pants first, before the strong arm. When removing clothing, assist with removing the stronger limb first. Consult with therapists and nurses on providing the best possible assistance.

Toileting: Incontinence

Urinary incontinence is the involuntary loss of urine to the degree that it is a social and/or health problem. Urinary incontinence is common in many diseases. See a physician, to check for treatable causes. There are a number of measures you can take to help ease problems related to incontinence.

- Keep a record of when the individual voids.
- Take the person to the bathroom routinely (i.e. every 2 hours) and strictly adhere to the schedule.
- Mark the bathroom with a sign for the toilet.
- Do not stop encouraging fluids. Older individuals should have 2 quarts of fluid everyday.
- Discourage drinking before bedtime.
- Use a plastic or rubber sheet on the bed. Some individuals use incontinence briefs.

Constipation or Irregularity

Constipation or irregularity may be caused by some medications, and inactivity. To avoid constipation:

- provide foods that are high in fiber, such as fruits, nuts, beans, vegetables, bran, and most cereals.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water a day (unless otherwise instructed by the physician).
- Avoid constipating foods such as cheese, rice, bananas, etc.
- Exercise daily to stimulate bowel activity.

Transferring

Transferring someone who cannot move safely by himself or herself requires skill, knowledge, and strength. **GET PROFESSIONAL ADVICE, GUIDANCE, AND TRAINING BEFORE TRYING TO LIFT OR TRANSFER SOMEONE BY YOURSELF.** For every type of disability, there is a specific technique to use. Wheelchair transfer, wheelchair to bed

transfers, and repositioning in a wheelchair, chair, or, bed are all movements that should be performed after proper training to ensure the safety of the patient and caregiver. Physical and occupational therapists, home health aides, and nurses, can demonstrate and train you in specific transferring techniques.

Once again, encourage your consumer to do as much as possible for himself/herself, maintaining as much independence as possible.

General tips for helping someone get around the house:

- If the consumer needs assistance to rise from a toilet, consider a raised toilet seat.
- If the consumer needs assistance to rise from a chair, it is much easier to stand up from a high, firm chair with arms, than from an overstuffed chair or sofa.
- When lifting, get close to the person, and keep your balance centered.
- Bend from your hips and knees. Use your leg muscles, not weak back muscles to lift.
- Do not twist when you are lifting, keep your spine and neck straight.
- Always tell your consumer what you are doing, before you do it, (i.e. I'm going to help you stand up now, I would like you to slide to the end of the chair, etc.).
- Allow both yourself and consumer plenty of time to complete the task.
- Do not pull on a person's neck, arms or legs, when assisting with transferring. Hold onto his or her hips and trunk of the body.
- Consider the purchase of a 'transfer belt'; available at pharmacies and medical supply stores, if you will need to routinely assist with transferring. The transfer belt goes around the consumer's waist, and gives you a secure grip.

If your consumer is falling

- Don't try to stop the fall. You could both be injured.
- Try to support the head and gradually ease the person onto the floor.
- If you are behind the person, let him/her gently slide down your body.

If the consumer falls and is on the floor

- Ask the person if he/she is okay. Check for bleeding.
- If the person looks injured, is in pain, or can't move any part of the body,

CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY.

- If the person isn't injured, ask him/her if he/she thinks he can get up safely.
- To help the person stand up from the floor, bring a chair close to him. Ask him/her to roll onto his side, get onto his knees, and then support himself/herself with the chair seat while he/she stands up.
- If the person needs more than a minimal amount of help, **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO LIFT THE PERSON BY YOURSELF.**

Rest and Sleep

Rest and sleep are vitally important to both you and your consumer. Lack of sleep can cause anxiety and irritability. While it is known that our sleep patterns change as we age, everyone requires a restful night of sleep to function at their best during the day. Sleeping problems may be caused by diet, medicine, inactivity, napping during the day, and changes in sleeping arrangements. It is important to discuss with the doctor any sleep disturbances that you or the consumer are having. Sleep disturbances may be attributed to medication, and/or physical ailments such as a bladder infection.

Some steps for a better night of sleep are:

- A person who is inactive during the day, and spends most of the day resting, is likely to be awake at night. Plan activities such as walking, late in the afternoon, and discouraging napping during the day.
- Eliminating alcohol, caffeine, and sweets from the diet, may reduce anxiety. Serving dinner at an earlier hour, and offering a light snack such as crackers or toast, warm milk or herbal tea, can be soothing, and may help a person feel sleepy.
- Initiate a bedtime routine. Try doing the same things each night before bed, such as listening to soft music, reading, give a relaxing back rub or leg massage, using the bathroom, etc. The bed should only be used for sleeping, not watching TV or reading. There are many videos available commercially of nature scenes, waterfalls, oceans, and other calming scenes. If your consumer has memory impairment, home videos of family and familiar events, may be calming and reassuring to the individual.
- If the consumer must get up at night to use the bathroom, make sure the way to the bathroom is softly but clearly lit.
- Keep the area around the bed clear to prevent falling. Blankets and covers should be tucked in.
- If the consumer wanders, consider blocking stairs, locking doors and windows, to prevent outside wandering.
- Adjust the temperature for the room, to make the consumer comfortable. Provide an extra blanket if necessary.