

What are activities of daily living?

Activities of daily living (ADLs) are the basic self-care tasks you do every day. As you age, if you have health problems, you may find that it's harder to do these things for yourself. That's when you may need some help.

Your doctor uses ADLs to measure how much help you need. Knowing what you can and can't do for yourself is an important first step to getting help. And when you have the help you need, you can stay as independent as possible.

Your doctor will want to know if you are able to do tasks such as:

- Take a bath or shower without help.
- Go to the washroom by yourself.
- Dress and undress without help.
- Shave, comb your hair, and brush teeth on your own.
- Get in and out of bed or a chair without help.
- Feed yourself without help.

If you are having trouble doing basic self-care tasks, talk with your doctor. You may want to bring a caregiver or family member who can help the doctor understand your needs and abilities.

How will a doctor assess your ADLs?

Asking about ADLs is part of a routine health checkup your doctor will likely do as you age. Your health check might be done in a doctor's office, in your home or at a hospital. The goal is to find out if you are having any problems that could make your health problems worse or make it unsafe for you to be on your own.

To measure your ADLs your doctor will ask how hard it is for you to do routine tasks. They may also want to know if you have changed the way you do a task because of a health problem. They may watch how you:

- Walk back and forth.
- Keep your balance while you stand or walk.
- Move from sitting to standing or from a bed to a chair.
- Button or unbutton a shirt or sweater.
- Remove and put on your shoes.

It's normal to feel a little worried or anxious if you find you can't do all the things you used to be able to do. Talking with your doctor about ADLs isn't a test that you either pass or fail. It's just a way to get more information about your health and safety.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments and call your doctor or nurse call line if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

For 24/7 medical advice and general health information call Health Link at 811.

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