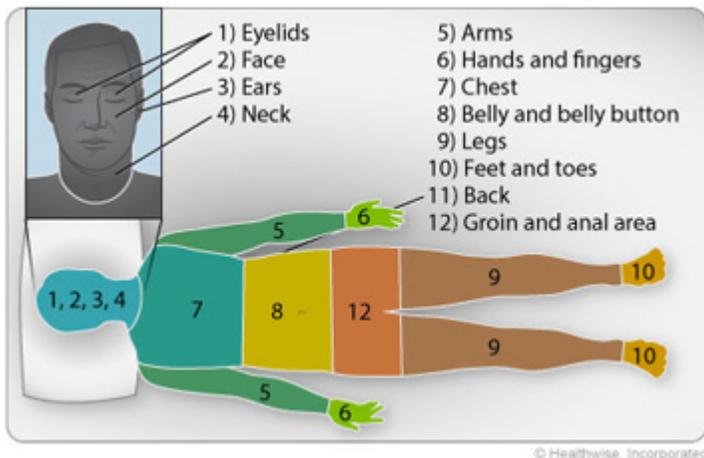


## Learning About How to Give a Bed Bath

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### Giving someone a bed bath: Overview

Bathing your loved one regularly is an important way to help keep their skin healthy. It can help prevent infections and it's a good time to check for sores or rashes. Bathing also helps your loved one feel fresh and clean.

The amount of help your loved one needs when bathing depends on how well he or she can move. You may be caring for someone who has short-term trouble with self-care because they are recovering from an illness or a surgery. Or you may be taking care of an older person who has memory problems and can't remember how to bathe. Or you could be caring for someone who has a long-term inability to move, such as a person who is paralyzed. This person may need much more help when bathing.

A person who has to stay in bed for a short time and who can move a little may be able to take a shower with some help once or twice a week. Or the person may prefer a partial bath at the sink or with a basin every day. A person who can't move well or who can't move at all needs a bed bath. This is often called a sponge bath, but face cloths are often used too. You can give a full bath in bed without getting the bed sheets wet.

Younger people who have no problems with blood flow can bathe more often if they want to. For older adults, you can give a bed bath 2 or 3 times each week. Bathing more often may put the person at risk for skin problems, such as sores.

Let your loved one clean themselves as much as possible. As you help to undress and bathe them, try to be as relaxed as possible. Bath time can be embarrassing for you and the person you're caring for. This may be especially true if you are caring for someone of the opposite sex. If you are calm and don't seem embarrassed, they may feel more comfortable.

## What can you do to prepare?

To get ready to give someone a bed bath, start by gathering materials. You will need:

- Four or more face cloths or bath sponges.
- Three or more towels.
- Two wash basins (one for soapy water, one for rinsing).
- Soap (a bar of soap, liquid soap, or wipes).
- "No-tears" or no-rinse shampoo.
- Body lotion.
- A waterproof mat or sheet to keep the bed dry.
- A table or stand to hold the materials.

Ask the person if the room is too warm or too cool and change the temperature if needed. Make sure that the bed is high enough so that you don't hurt your back. If it's low, it's okay to put your knee on the bed to reach over and bathe the person.

Place a waterproof mat or sheet under the person to keep the bed dry. And for privacy, make sure the door is shut and the blinds or drapes are closed.

## How can you help with the bath?

When you help someone bathe you may have a chance to check the skin for redness or sores. Pay special attention to areas with creases, such as beneath the breasts or in the folds on the stomach. Also look at the groin area and bony areas, such as the elbows and shoulders.

Start by filling two basins with warm water. Use the first basin for soaping up a face cloth and wringing it out. Use the second to hold clean water for rinsing the soap off. Use the back of your hand to test the water to make sure it's not too hot. You don't have to wear gloves, but it might be a good idea if the person has been vomiting or has had diarrhea. It's a good idea to wear a mask if you or the person has an illness that can spread, such as a cold or influenza (flu).

- Wash and dry your hands, and put on gloves if you choose to wear them.
- Let the person undress and wash as much as they are able. Remove clothing only from the area you are going to wash. For example, uncover an arm, wash and dry it, and then put it back into a shirt or gown.
- Wash with the face cloth and soapy water or wipes, and then rinse using another face cloth and the clear water.

- Start with the cleanest areas of the body and finish with the areas that are less clean. After you wash an area, turn the face cloth so you can use a new, clean part of it for the next area. Use a new face cloth when you need one.
  - Wash the eyelids, starting from the inside and moving out.
  - Wash the face, ears, and neck.
  - Wash the arms one at a time, and then the hands.
  - Wash the chest and belly, including the belly button.
  - Wash one leg, and then the other.
  - Wash the feet and in between the toes.
  - Help the person roll on to their side so you can wash the back side. (If you can't roll a person by yourself, get someone to help you so that you don't hurt your back.) Then help the person roll onto their back.
  - Pour out the water (which by now may be cold) and replace it with fresh warm water.
  - Using a new face cloth, clean the genital area first and then the anal area.
- Remove gloves if you are wearing them. Change the water and wash the hair. You can use water and no-tears or no-rinse shampoo. Look carefully at the scalp for any redness or sores.
- Rinse the hair with clean, warm water.

When you are finished with the bath, apply an unscented body lotion to protect the skin and keep it from becoming dry. Don't put lotion on areas that can become moist, such as under the breasts or in the folds of the groin. Help the person as needed to finish dressing. Put away your supplies and wash your hands.

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

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