

Helping someone with a shower: Overview

A shower helps the person you're caring for feel clean and fresh. It's also a good time to check their skin for sores or rashes.

It's a good idea for the person to have a shower at least once a week, if possible. On other days, he or she may just want to take a bath at the sink.

To take a shower, the person may need help to step over the side of a bathtub or the edge of a shower stall. But they may need only a little help to take a shower. Let them do as much of the bathing as possible.

It's important to have handrails and a non-skid mat in the shower or tub. A shower chair or a bench also is a good idea. You can find many styles of these devices. With a shower chair, the person can sit in either the shower or the tub while bathing. A bench sits on the edges of the bathtub. The person can sit on the bench and then swing his or her legs into the tub. The bench can help a person get into the tub and can be used during the shower.

As you help to undress and bathe your loved one, try to be as relaxed as possible. Shower 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.

Give your loved one as much privacy as possible. If he or she is safe alone for a while and is able to bathe without help, shut the door or close a curtain and step out of the bathroom. Stay close in case they ask for help.

If the person you're caring for has dementia, they may not remember how to take a shower. Sometimes it helps to bring the person into the shower fully dressed. It can remind them of how to take a shower and the need to undress. Some people are afraid of the water or don't like how it feels. If the person doesn't want to get under the water, don't force them. Encourage them to have a sink bath instead.

What can you do to prepare?

When you help someone take a shower, start by gathering materials. You will need:

- Face cloths or bath sponges.
- Towels.

- A bar of soap or liquid soap.
- Tear-free shampoo or no-rinse shampoo.
- Body lotion that is especially for dry skin.
- A removable showerhead with a long hose (if you have one).

Offer the person a robe for comfort and privacy while you set up the shower supplies. A terry cloth robe works well because it can be worn after the shower to help the person dry off. Set up the shower chair or bench. Help the person onto the chair if they need help.

Let the person take off the robe, but give help if they need it. Remember to use the back of your hand to test the water to make sure it's not too hot or cold.

You don't have to wear gloves, but it might be a good idea if the person has been vomiting or has had diarrhea. And 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).

How can you help with the shower?

- Once the person is safely in the shower, put soap on the face cloth or sponge and give it to them. Let the person wash themselves. You can wash areas that they can't reach, such as the back.
- Gently remind the person you're caring for that it's best to start with the cleanest areas and finish with those that are less clean. They can start with their face, then wash their arms, torso, back, and then the legs and feet. He or she can finish by cleaning the groin and anal areas.
- Help the person wash their hair with tear-free or no-rinse shampoo.
- Hand them the removable showerhead to rinse off. Or you can do it if it's too hard for them to manage.
- Give the person a towel to dry off and help dry their back and any other areas that are hard to reach, such as between the toes.
- Offer some body lotion. Don't put lotion on areas that can become moist, such as under the breasts or in the folds of the groin.

When you help someone bathe, remember to check their skin as you go for signs of rashes or sores. Pay special attention to areas with creases, such as under the breasts or the folds on the stomach. Also look at bony areas, like the elbows and shoulders. If you see any redness, do not rub or massage the red areas. It could cause more tissue damage.

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