

Giving someone a sink bath: Overview

A sink bath, or basin bath, helps the person you're caring for stay clean and fresh in between showers. It can be a good choice when your loved one is too tired for a shower or can't move around or walk much.

The person may want a sink bath every day or a few times a week. Their hair may not need to be washed every time.

As you help to undress and bathe the person, try to be relaxed. 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, the person may feel more comfortable. Give them as much privacy as possible. If they are safe alone for a while and are 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.

A bath at the sink may be a good choice if your loved one has dementia. They may not want or be able to do a full shower.

What can you do to prepare?

When you help someone take a sink bath, 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 (if the hair needs to be washed).

Offer the person a robe for comfort and privacy while you set up the supplies. Or they can undress only the part of the body that is being bathed. Set up a shower stool or chair at the sink, or the person can stay in a wheelchair if they use one.

Let the person take off the robe (or uncover the areas to be bathed) 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. 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 sink bath?

Put soap on the face cloth or sponge and give it to the person. Let the person do the bathing as much as possible. You can help if there are areas they can't reach. This is just a partial bath, so the person needs to wash only certain parts of the body. It's fine to wash only the face, underarms, and groin and anal areas—in that order. If possible, check the skin for signs of rashes or sores.

After washing with soap, rinse off the soap with a fresh, damp face cloth. Help the person wash their hair if that is part of this bath. Give them a towel to dry off, or put one within reach, and help them dress if they want help.

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

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