

Dementia Care: Tips to Assist with Dressing

As dementia progresses, getting dressed can become an overwhelming task. Keep the following tips in mind when providing assistance.

Encourage Independence

- Enable the person with dementia to make choices and accomplish as much as possible independently. It may take extra time, but is well worth it to build up self-esteem.
- Allow the person to retain his or her own sense of personal style. Photographs can be helpful to remember preferred hairstyles, make-up or accessories.

Make the Person Comfortable

- Allow plenty of time. A person with dementia may take longer to process information, and patience is the key.
- Be tactful. Reminding someone that his clothing needs to be changed can make him feel embarrassed.
- Make sure the room is warm enough to get dressed in and that the lighting levels are suitable.
- Help maintain privacy by closing the curtains and make sure no one interrupts.
- If the person has trouble balancing, allow him to sit in a suitable chair while getting dressed.
- Several thin layers of clothing are better than one thick layer, so layers can be removed if it gets too warm. Keep in mind that the person may not be able to tell you when he is too hot or cold, so keep an eye out for signs of discomfort.



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Keep It Simple

- Too many options can be confusing. Clear away clutter and make suggestions one at a time.
- Lay out clothes on a non-patterned background in the order the person will put them on. Try to keep to the person's preferred routine—for example, he may like to put on his underwear and socks before putting on anything else.
- Make sure that items are not inside out and that buttons, zippers and fasteners are all undone.
- If the person is confused, give instructions in small steps, such as, "Now put your arm through the sleeve."

Accept Imperfection

- Respect the person's choice, even if it does not match or is a bit odd. As long as it does no harm, it's best not to have a confrontation.
- If mistakes are made, such as a backwards shirt, be tactful, or find a way for you both to laugh about it.

Eliminating Battles

- If the person wants to wear the same outfit every day, purchase several of the same outfit.
- If the person is reluctant to change, encourage him by having him change for a special occasion or a visit with a friend. If resistance continues, try again later.
- Remove dirty clothing and put clean clothing in its place when the person is bathing.
- Some people with dementia may undress at an inappropriate time. Quickly assess the situation and ask yourself if the person could be bored, tired, hot, cold, sensitive to a texture, frightened of something unfamiliar or need to use the bathroom.

Practical Tips

- Offer clothing that is easy to put on and take off. Larger neck openings, front or Velcro fastenings, boxer shorts and supportive slip-on shoes that have non-skid soles will be easier to manage.
- The type of clothing being worn may affect what the person thinks he should be doing. For example, if he is dressed in a suit, he may think he needs to go to work. If he is wearing nightwear during the day, he may think that it is time for bed.

For more tips on providing care for a person with dementia, visit www.CareWorksHealthServices.com or call (949) 859-4700 or (714) 421-4005.



Sources: Alzheimer's Society, Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's Australia