

Bathing Without Conflicts

Bathing can be a traumatic experience for some aging adults, particularly if they suffer from some form of dementia. It's important to remain patient and calm in the face of challenging behaviors that surface during bathing, and to realize that a number of factors may be contributing to the senior's distress: increased sensitivity to the temperature or pressure of the water, feelings of lost independence and dignity, or a lapse in memory preventing the person from understanding the purpose of the bathing process.

There are a number of ways to make bathing more comfortable for both the person being bathed and the caregiver.

First and foremost, make sure the bathing area is safe:

- Use grab bars and slip-resistant mats.
- Make sure the water temperature is neither too hot nor too cold (recommended bath water temperature is a degree or two higher than normal body temperature).
- Keep sharp, dangerous, and breakable items out of reach.
- Always supervise a person with dementia in the bathroom.
- Place towels, soap and other needed materials close at hand.

Try the following tips to improve bathtime experiences:

- Allow the elderly person to have a sense of control in the process. Offer choices, and allow him or her to assist in some way, such as holding the washcloth or a bottle of shampoo.
- Keep bathing time on a set schedule, at the same time each day.
- Clean the elderly person's skin gently.
- Break down instructions for each step in the bathing process; i.e., "Place your feet into the tub. Now, sit down. Take the washcloth in your hand. Now, wash your arm." Using nonverbal cues to show by example can also help the person understand what to expect next.
- Use an adjustable tub or shower chair.



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Try these alternatives to traditional bathing:

- **Towel Bath:** Utilize no-rinse soap and a large, warm, damp towel for a bed bath instead of the typical washcloth and basin of water.
- **Recliner Bath:** With the person lounging in a recliner, utilize a basin of water, washcloth and no-rinse soap, but pad body parts being washed with a towel and incontinence pad to absorb extra water.
- **Toilet Bath:** For those who are especially agitated by a bath routine, combining toileting with washing can be an effective alternative.
- **Singing Bath:** If your loved one responds positively to particular songs, try singing to him or her as a distraction when it's bath time.
- **Seven-Day Bath:** Clean just a section of the body each day, which may be more tolerable than trying to tackle everything at once.

For more tips on easing the stress of bathtime for your elderly loved one, or for more information on utilizing the bathing services of our fully trained, experienced and patient caregivers, contact CareWorks Health Services.

