



At Arbor Springs we are dedicated to helping families manage the realities of dementia with as much love, dignity, and knowledge as possible. This monthly e-newsletter is our way of offering helpful tips and insights that will hopefully make your days with your loved one a little easier, happier, and calm.

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, your loved one will need more and more help with the seemingly simple activities of daily living (ADLs). To assist with these activities, caregivers need knowledge, skill, and patience.

Bathing is often the most difficult personal care activity that caregivers face. Because bathing is a very personal and private experience, people with Alzheimer's may perceive it as unpleasant or intrusive and may become resistant. Such behavior often occurs because the person lacks understanding of the bathing task, fears the water, or because he or she is embarrassed/uncomfortable. Consequently, you will need to take additional steps when assisting with bathing to ensure your loved one's safety and to prevent distress.

Preparing in advance:

1. Make the bathroom safe. Install grab bars, place non-skid mats on floors, use a tub bench or bath chair that can be adjusted to different heights, and lower the thermostat on your hot-water heater to prevent scalding injuries. Also, use products made of non-breakable materials. Keep sharp objects (i.e. tweezers, scissors) out of reach, and don't store cleaning products in the bathroom.
2. Set a regular time for bathing. If your loved one typically bathed in the morning, it may confuse him or her to bathe at night. Determine what time of day is best for the person and then set a routine.
3. Gather all bathing supplies including towels, washcloth, shampoo, and soap.
4. Make the room comfortable. Pad the shower seat and other cold or uncomfortable surfaces with towels. Ensure that the room is warm enough and well-lit.
5. Always check the temperature of the water in the bath or shower as well as the spray on the shower head.. Your loved one may not sense when the water is dangerously hot (hence why it is important to lower the thermostat on your hot-water heater) or may resist bathing if the water is too cool. Remember, what is "just right" for you may be too hot or cold for your loved one. Let he/she be the guide for a comfortable temperature for him/her. In addition, the person's skin may be very sensitive so the water pressure may need to be lowered.
6. Use music to set the tone. Play soothing music or perhaps choose something your loved

one could sing along to.

Adapting the bathing process:

1. Always protect the person's dignity and privacy. Cover the person with a bath blanket while undressing and let the person hold a towel in front of his or her body when getting in and out of the shower.
2. Simplify the bathing process. Try different approaches to make bathing easier. For instance, sewing pockets into washcloths may help the person hold on to the soap, or use soap that washes both hair and body. If a longer bath time increases your loved one's anxiety, you may want to shorten the process further by using no-rinse products.
3. As much as possible, stick to a routine. Follow the same steps in the same order, while coaching the person through each step. For example: "Here is the soap. Wash your leg."
4. Encourage independence. Resistance is often as a result of a person's perceived loss of control. Allowing the person to do as much as possible gives he/she some control over the situation and promotes his/her self-esteem. Be ready to assist when needed, but try to offer only the level of help necessary. Try using a "watch me" technique or lead by example. Put your hand over the person's hand, gently guiding the washing actions.
5. If bathing presents a constant battle, choose to set aside that battle and encourage your loved one to sponge bathe. You may want to try non-rinse soap products, which can be used with warm towels and applied under the guise of providing a "massage." Sometimes people respond better to the use of different words such as "wash up" versus "shower time."
6. Have a familiar/consistent person assist with showering. If someone is embarrassed or becomes sexually inappropriate, have a caregiver of the same sex provide the shower. Sometimes families have to hire an experienced home health care aide. Some people respond better to someone who is not a family member when it comes to an intimate task like bathing.
7. NEVER LEAVE A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA ALONE IN A SHOWER OR BATH.

Despite your best efforts, there may be times when your loved one will demonstrate difficult behavior with bathing. Do not take it personally. As with anything, remaining patient, calm, and flexible will serve you best.

If you have specific questions that you would like answered in an upcoming issue of this e-newsletter please reach out to Monica Kuehl, RN, BSN, Director of Marketing/Admissions at [m.kuehl@arborsprings.org](mailto:m.kuehl@arborsprings.org) or at 515-223-1135 and I'll do my best to get to them all.