

# Bathing

At some point, people with Alzheimer's disease will need help bathing. Because this is a private activity, people may not want help. They may also feel angry about not being able to take care of themselves.

Helping someone with Alzheimer's disease take a bath or shower can be one of the hardest things you do. Planning can help make bath time better for both of you. If the person is afraid of bathing, follow his or her lifelong bathing habits, such as doing the bath or shower in the morning or before going to bed.

## Safety Tips

To keep the person with Alzheimer's safe during bath time:

- Never leave a confused or frail person alone in the tub or shower.
- Always check the water temperature before he or she gets in the tub or shower.
- Use a hand-held showerhead.
- Use a rubber bath mat and safety bars in the tub.
- Use a sturdy shower chair to support a person who is unsteady and to prevent falls. You can buy shower chairs at drug stores and medical supply stores.



## Before Bathing

Before starting a bath or shower:

- Get the soap, washcloth, towels, and shampoo ready.
- Make sure the bathroom is warm and well lighted.
- Play soft music if it helps to relax the person.
- Be matter-of-fact about bathing. Say, "It's time for a bath now." Don't argue about the need for a bath or shower.
- Be gentle and respectful. Tell the person what you are going to do, step by step.
- Make sure the water temperature is comfortable.
- Don't use bath oil. It can make the tub slippery and may cause urinary tract infections.

## During a Bath or Shower

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Allow the person with Alzheimer's to do as much as possible. This protects his or her dignity and helps the person feel more in control. Here are other tips:

- Put a towel over the person's shoulders or lap. This helps him or her feel less exposed. Then use a sponge or washcloth to clean under the towel.
- Distract the person by talking about something else if he or she becomes upset.
- Give the person a washcloth to hold. This makes it less likely that he or she will try to hit you.



### For more caregiving tips and other resources:

- **Read** "Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease": [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease)
- **Visit** [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving)
- **Call** the ADEAR Center toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

## After Bathing

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Try these suggestions:

- Prevent rashes or infections by patting the person's skin with a towel. Make sure the person is completely dry. Be sure to dry between folds of skin.
- If the person is incontinent, use a protective ointment, such as petroleum jelly, around the rectum, vagina, or penis.
- If the person has trouble getting in and out of the bathtub, do a sponge bath instead.

## Other Bathing Tips

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For most people, a full bath or shower two or three times a week is enough. Between full baths, a sponge bath to clean the face, hands, feet, underarms, and genitals is all you need to do every day. Also:

- Washing the person's hair in the sink with a hose attachment may be easier than doing it in the shower or bathtub.
- Get professional help with bathing if it becomes too hard for you to do on your own.

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The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive changes.

