

Church Name

Jane Doe, RN, FCN

## ASSISTING OLDER ADULTS WITH BATHING

Regular bathing keeps the skin healthy and stimulates blood flow to the skin. It helps the older adult feel presentable by reducing body odors and makes him/her feel relaxed and well cared for. Assistance with bathing also gives the caregiver an opportunity to observe for skin problems.

### Tips for promoting the independence of the older adult with bathing:

- Allow him/her to do as much as possible throughout the bathing process.
- Set up the bathroom for bathing and cleaning up afterwards, if needed.
- Provide privacy, but offer stand-by supervision, if needed.

### Tips for promoting safety during the bathing process:

- Check water temperature on the inside of your wrist.
- Provide a non-skid mat or apply stick-on non-slip strips or decals in the tub or shower.
- Install grab bars strategically located for assisting the older adult with transferring into the tub or shower. (NOTE: Towel rods are an unsafe support for transferring and should not be used.)
- Provide a tub or shower bench so the older adult can bathe (or be bathed) sitting down.
- Install a hand-held shower device to facilitate bathing in a seated position.
- Avoid use of bath oils as these make tub surfaces slippery. They also can cause vaginal infections in women.
- Never leave an impaired person alone in the tub or shower.
- Mop up water on the bathroom floor so the older adult will not slip and fall.

### Tips for gaining the cooperation of the older adult with the bathing process:

- Accommodate his/her usual routine.
- Preserve the older adult's modesty as much as possible.
- Give as many choices as possible.
- Warm up the bathroom ahead of time and eliminate drafts.
- Wash his/her hard-to-reach areas (back and feet), letting the older adult do as much of the rest as possible.

### Hygiene needs of older adults:

- Many older adults have not been accustomed to bathing daily. Too frequent bathing dries out the skin of the older adult.
- If the older person wants a total bath only once a week or so, partial bathing focusing on face, hands, axilla (underarm area), back, buttocks, and perineal area on the other days can help promote good hygiene.
- Use bath time as an opportunity to inspect the skin of the older adult. Watch for redness, especially at any point at which pressure over bony prominences is exerted by prolonged sitting or lying. Also do not ignore complaints of burning, pain or tingling of the skin, especially over bony prominences. These complaints may precede the development of a pressure ulcer.
- Make sparing use of a gentle soap that is super-fatted or glycerin-based.
- Older skin is much drier than younger skin. Avoid hot water. Use a good quality lubricating lotion for dry skin (except between the toes).
- Rinse the older adult's skin thoroughly to remove all soap residue. (Left on the skin, soap residue will cause itching and increased dryness.) (OVER)

- Gently pat the skin dry; do not rub vigorously (vigorous rubbing can be damaging to the older adult's frail skin), but dry the skin thoroughly, especially in areas when skin touches skin (under the breasts, in abdominal folds and between the legs). Cornstarch helps to keep these areas dry, but must be completely removed with each bath.

**If it is necessary to bathe the older adult in bed due to extreme weakness or other restrictions, follow this procedure:**

- Explain what you are planning to do step by step before you start.
- If the older adult has a hospital bed, raise it to the highest position before starting.
- Reduce drafts in the room and keep him/her as warm as possible during the bathing process by covering the older adult with a large towel or lightweight blanket, exposing only the area being washed. Fanfold regular linens toward the foot of the bed.
- Put a towel under each body part as you wash it.
- Wrap the washcloth around your hand, fold it over at your fingertips, and tuck it in at your palm so that cool ends do not drag on the older adult's skin. The wash cloth should be wet, but not dripping.
- Start at the older adult's head and work down to his/her feet, washing from the cleanest to the dirtiest areas.
- Use gentle, but deliberate touch, with long, firm strokes.
- With a clean washcloth and no soap, wash from the inner corner of each eye in an outward direction.
- Avoid using soap on the face, unless the older adult has a special facial soap.
- Wash and dry thoroughly the area under the breasts, especially in large breasted women, as the skin can become red and irritated. This problem is most acute in hot weather.
- Change the water frequently, but especially when soapy, cool, or after washing the perineal (genital) area.
- Assist (if needed) the older adult to turn to his/her side for washing the back and buttocks. Place a towel on the bed, tucked under his/her back and buttocks. Pay special attention to condition of the skin between the gluteal folds (between the buttocks), looking for any redness or open areas over the sacrum.
- After washing the older adult's back, apply lotion and massage the skin of the back with long strokes in the direction of the head. Warm the lotion in your hands before applying it to the older adult's back. Massaging stimulates circulation to the skin. Do not massage over any reddened area. Continue to observe any red areas and if they persist, report them to the older adult's medical provider as soon as possible.
- Allow the older adult to wash his/her own perineal area if at all possible. If you must wash this area, wear disposable gloves. After the perineal area has been washed, use a clean washcloth to complete the bath.
- Wash the feet by bending his/her knee and placing one foot at a time in a basin of water, if the older adult can cooperate. (Place a towel on the bed under the basin.) Dry feet thoroughly, especially between the toes.

**Special considerations for bathing older adults with memory loss:**

- Older adults with progressive memory loss gradually lose the ability to perform hygiene tasks independently and will eventually need total help.
- Follow the older adult's established routines, as much as possible.
- Avoid discussions about whether a bath is needed or not. Simply state: "Your bath water's ready, Dad."
- In a relaxed manner, using calming language, give instructions in short, simple phrases.
- If the older adult resists a shower or tub bath, the resistance could be an expression of his/her fears, e.g., of falling. A bath bench may help, or a sponge bath at the sink can meet his/her hygiene needs if that is the only bathing method the older adult will tolerate.
- If the older adult resists during the bathing procedure, it may be an indication of unmet needs. Is the water too hot? Is the room too cool? Does he/she need to use the toilet?
- Place the greatest importance on the older adult's comfort, self-esteem, and his/her need for autonomy and privacy and adjust your plans to accommodate these needs.
- Sometimes older adults with memory loss will respond better to assistance with bathing from a person unrelated to them. Consider contracting with a home health agency to relieve you of this task. You can find a home care provider at the web site of the Minnesota Home Care Agency: [www.mnhomecare.org](http://www.mnhomecare.org).