

## A Day to Day Cheerleader

An individual's personal grooming routine is developed over a lifetime. It helps to follow these habits, even after a loved one seems to have forgotten them. While it often easier and faster for the caregiver to step in and help with a difficult activity, the caregiver should avoid doing so and instead encourage and assist. At times, this is impossible, such as when a situation becomes potentially dangerous or when the person grows agitated. Skills that aren't used will be lost, especially with a person with Alzheimer's.

## 1-2-3 Cha Cha Cha

Helping an Alzheimer's patient through a difficult task is like dancing--- you want to lead the person in the dance, without dancing for him or her. When grooming and bathing, break activities into basic steps and speak the loved one through the process. Try to assist without taking over. When a difficult step happens, help as needed. For example, when shaving, speak him through the steps to lather his face, then, if necessary, step in to shave him to prevent injury. Once you are done, speak him through the steps of rinsing and drying his face.

## Praise and Encourage

Offer encouragement and praise as he accomplishes or tries each step. A person's sense of accomplishment is very deeply ingrained. Although a person may suffer severe memory loss, the personal satisfaction of doing a job well and being praised for the effort may trigger a sense of self worth, even though the moment may prove to be fleeting.

## An Oil and Vinegar Bath

Alzheimer's and bathing often don't mix. While most of us find bathing a pleasurable activity, it is not always the case with a person with Alzheimer's. In nursing homes, agitated, difficult and violent behavior most likely happens while bathing. For the home caregiver, **this should serve a warning to prepare for a potential storm.**

## Make Bathing Pleasurable

**Observe and remember** what makes bathing pleasurable for your loved one. If and when the day comes when it is no longer pleasurable, try to recall what was done differently (i.e. time of day, routine before bathing, temperature and other conditions, etc.). Follow the routines that work and attune yourself to situations which result in pleasure **and** displeasure.

**Be positive:** People are more likely to respond to positive suggestions (you'll feel so good after a nice, warm shower; let's freshen up), than negative ones (you stink; you desperately need a shower.)

**Put the individual first:** Bathing is about the loved one. It's not about you or your likes and dislikes. Make the experience pleasurable for the loved one.

**Be flexible and go with the flow.** Adjust the routine to make life easier, as long as it doesn't cause agitation. Perhaps, it's easier to undress in the bedroom prior to moving into the bath, or change the time of the bath so that it is not hurried. Think through the process: how can this be done easier without causing problems?

**Use persuasion, not coercion.** The bath is not a good room for a fight; it's slippery and potentially dangerous for both of you. If you can't sweet talk the loved one into the bath, don't force the issue. Consider another tact--- divert attention to another bathroom activity, then try the bath again; add some music or apply a fragrant body lotion to try to relax the patient. Try to let the patient feel in control of the situation. When the bath proves impossible, consider rinse-less or soap-less bathing products. (See: Part 2)

## General tips for bathing

Elderly people often can bathe every other day. Make sure, however, that basic hand and face washing is maintained and the genital areas are clean. Keep the room comfortably warm. Warm water is better for elderly skin; avoid hot water. Have all supplies ready, including rubber gloves to prevent contact with bodily fluids or feces. Consider foaming soaps or soaps that lather quickly or one-step, no rinse soaps; if the bath proves difficult, you want to be able to get the person out quickly. Soap in the eyes may trigger agitation, consider tearless shampoos.