

# Dressing without Stressing

## THE SITUATION

Coordinating an outfit for the day can be an exciting experience. According to how you're feeling, you may select, perhaps, a bright yellow shirt with a plaid skirt or a brown sweater with brown pants. But for an individual with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias, getting dressed can be a confusing and challenging task. Trouble with decision-making, problems with balance and motor skills, or forgetting the dressing process entirely can all come into play.

With your help, dressing can become a tool to promote positive self-esteem for your loved one.

Here are some tips for dressing without stressing:

## THE SOLUTION

- **Practice patience.** Encourage self-dressing to promote independence, but intervene when attempts are unsuccessful. Offer simple one-step instructions, be sensitive and be specific: for example, say "put on your pants" instead of "get dressed." Use gestures to demonstrate how to carry out the task. Try not to rush your loved one since this may increase anxiety and frustration.
- **Establish a routine.** Use a consistent method of dressing, such as same time of day and same order of clothing. Dressing someone's upper body first and lower body second is most effective. Lay out articles of clothing in the proper order that they should be put on. Hand the person one item at a time.
- **Limit confusion.** Offer only two choices of outfits. Since your loved one may be fond of a particular article of clothing, consider stocking identical multiples of that "favorite." Doing so will reduce the decision-making process and help with cleanliness.
- **Communicate appropriately.** Offer compliments, not criticism or arguments, even if the clothing your loved one chooses doesn't match or has just been worn. In communicating with him or her, always rely on the four Ss: Simple, Slow, Show and Smile.



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- **Dress right.** Loose fitting clothing with elastic waistbands, versus zippers, and tops with buttons in the front are easiest to maneuver. Ensure the proper length of pants or a skirt to prevent tripping, and pick clothing that is appropriate for the weather. Choose materials that are soft and comfortable.
- **Tread lightly.** Be sure your loved one's feet have adequate support—shoes or sneakers instead of slippers. Footwear with crepe or rubber soles assist in preventing falls.

— SAIDAH HENDERSON

## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

A wardrobe that consists of the right type and right quantity of clothing is helpful. As part of your spring cleaning, eliminate excess clothing in order to reduce choices and confusion. Consider replacing buttons, zippers and snaps with pressure tape or Velcro.

Also find retail outlets, such as The Alzheimer's Store ([www.alzstore.com](http://www.alzstore.com)), which sell adaptive clothing or other garments best-suited to make dressing easier and to preserve dignity.