



Bathing Made Easier

THE SITUATION

It's 8 a.m. Time for your mother's shower. Earlier in the week, the bathing process—undressing, toileting, washing, drying, and dressing—went like clockwork. But yesterday each step of the way twisted your stomach into knots. Today could be either or. Like other activities of daily living, bathing often presents challenges for caregivers—possibly new ones each day, each week, each month as your loved one's dementia progresses. Knowing what to expect and how to respond can make bathing easier.

During the bathing process, individuals with dementia may exhibit various behaviors. Most common: resistance, fright, embarrassment, distress, and disorientation. In addition, their inability to do things that were once routine may become apparent. They might forget how to undress, brush their hair, pick up their legs, sit in the bathtub, or steady themselves while transferring. And they might be unable to communicate that the water is too hot or too cold, for example.

Prepare in Advance

Appropriate room temperature. Soap and other bathing items. Towels. Bathrobe. Post-bathing clothing.

THE SOLUTION

- ▶ Follow bathing patterns that existed prior to the onset of the disease, such as frequency, time of day and shower versus bath. But be flexible and adjust this schedule, if necessary. For example, switch gears if your loved one becomes overly agitated or wakes up soiled in the morning. Change to a morning bath if sundowning behavior occurs toward evening.
- ▶ Keep safety in mind. Never leave your loved one unattended in the bathing area, and remove bathroom door locks. Outfit bathtubs and showers with no-skid surfaces and grab bars to minimize risks. Adjust the hot water heater to prevent scalding. Always approach the person from the front. Eliminate distractions.
- ▶ Think comfort. Make sure the room temperature is appropriate for disrobing. Have your loved one stay in a warm room until he or she is completely dry and clothed, and move quickly from drying to dressing.
- ▶ Watch your communication style. Keep things simple—simple words and one-step directions. Use non-verbal gestures to communicate what you want done. Be patient and reassuring. Smile and speak calmly.
- ▶ Maintain dignity. Let your loved one help as much as possible, fostering as much independence as his or her abilities allow. Speak directly and make eye contact. Provide privacy and ensure dignity during each step of the process.