

Personal Care of Your Consumer

An important aspect of maintaining good health is good personal hygiene. Your consumer might not be able to manage the activities of personal hygiene on his/her own and time may be authorized for you to help in these areas.

Bathing

A bath cleans the skin and helps keep it free of germs. If you care for someone who needs help with bathing, keep things as pleasant and relaxed as possible. Encourage the consumer to bathe him/herself as much as possible.

- Wear gloves and other personal protective equipment any time that you may come into contact with bodily fluids or feces.
- Most people do not need a daily bath, though hands, face, and genital area should be washed every day.
- Have all supplies ready before starting a bath.
- Keep the room comfortably warm.
- Respect the consumer's privacy. Keep him/her covered when possible.

If the consumer is able to get into a tub or shower:

- Make sure that grab bars, tub benches, and handheld shower attachments are properly installed.
- Use a non-slip bath mat.
- Ask him/her to sit on the edge of the tub and then put both legs into the tub before he/she stands up.
- Reverse the process when getting out of the tub.

Bed Baths

Giving a bed bath means washing someone who is confined to a bed or unable to bathe him/herself. Make sure to let the consumer wash as much of him/herself as possible.

- Keep the room warm while giving the bath by closing the windows and turning up the heat.
- Fill a basin with warm water. The water should be comfortably warm to your elbow.
- Use a blanket to cover the consumer after undressing and while bathing. This will keep the consumer warm and ensure privacy.

- Wearing gloves, wet a washcloth without soap. Starting with the consumer's face, wipe the eyes from the inside to the outside and dry with a towel, rinsing between eyes.
- Using a mild soap, wash the rest of the body with a washcloth and rinse and dry all areas. Be sure to put a towel under each part before washing. After washing the head and neck, chest, stomach, arms, legs, and feet, empty the dirty water in the sink and refill with clean water.
- Put a towel on the bed along the consumer's back. Wash his/her neck, back, buttocks, and thighs. Rinse and dry as before.
- The pubic area is the last area to be washed. It is the area between the thighs and includes the genitals and anus. Empty and refill your bucket with clean water.
 - For a female, put a towel under her buttocks and ask her to bend her knees and spread her legs while lying on her back. Using a soapy washcloth, wash her from front to back, making sure not to touch the anus with the washcloth. Rinse the washcloth to remove the soap and dry the area with a towel. Ask or help the consumer to turn onto her side so that she is facing away from you and raise her top leg. Slide the towel once again under the buttocks. Wash, rinse, and dry the anal area.
 - For a male, ask or help him to lie on his back. Put the towel under his buttocks. Ask or help him to bend his knees slightly and spread his legs. Hold the penis with one hand and wash, rinse, and dry the penis and scrotum, making sure to gently push back the foreskin (the skin that covers the rounded end of the penis). Ask or help the consumer to turn onto his side away from you with his top leg raised. Slide the towel once again under the buttocks. Wash, rinse, and dry the anal area.
- Throw away the dirty water and clean the basin. Put away any items used for the bath.

Skin Care

Consumers who must stay in bed or in a wheelchair are at risk for pressure ulcers, also called bedsores. Pressure ulcers are a serious problem but can be prevented in most cases with proper skin care.

- Keep the skin clean and dry.
- Clean off urine or feces immediately with soap and water while wearing disposable gloves.
- Check the skin regularly for red areas. A good time to do this is while giving a bath.

- Every two hours, change the position of a person who is bed or wheelchair-bound. Avoid dragging the consumer when you move them as friction can cause damage to the skin and increase the chance of getting bedsores.
- Apply lotion to dry skin regularly (except between the toes where it can cause fungal growth). Give a light massage while rubbing in the lotion.

If you notice a red patch on the skin:

- Remove pressure from the area immediately.
- While wearing gloves, clean and dry areas soiled with urine or feces.
- DO NOT massage the area.
- Recheck the skin in 15 minutes. If the redness is gone, no other action is needed.
- If the redness does not disappear after 15 minutes, have your consumer contact his/her health care professional about better ways to relieve pressure from the skin.
- If a blister or open area develops, have your consumer contact his/her health care professional immediately.

Shaving

- Encourage the consumer to do as much for him/herself as possible. Supervise the use of razors closely for safe and correct handling before allowing a consumer to shave independently.
- Only use a consumer's personal razor.
- Use an electric shaver when possible as it can be safer and easier. However, do not use an electric razor around water or in the same room where oxygen is being used.
- Put dentures in the consumer's mouth before shaving him.
- Teach and assist the consumer in locating the best place to complete his/her shaving. A sitting position is usually preferred.
- If shaving with a non-electric razor, the area should first be washed with warm, soapy water. Apply shaving cream or lather with soap. One hand should hold the skin tight while the other shaves in the direction the hair grows. Rinse the razor frequently to remove hair and shaving cream. Rinse off the remaining shaving cream when shaving is complete and dry skin. Apply aftershave or lotion if necessary.

Denture Care

- Clean dentures preferably twice a day.
- Check dentures regularly for cracks.
- Remove dentures for cleaning and store in liquid.

Dressing

- Ask the consumer what he/she prefers to wear. For example, wearing a bra or pantyhose may not be important to her. Let the consumer choose what to wear, laying out two choices to simplify this for someone who is confused.
- Allow enough time for the consumer to do as much as he/she can for him/herself. Easy-to-use clothes with large front fasteners (zippers or velcro) elastic waistbands, and slip-on shoes can make dressing easier but the consumer must choose to wear these clothes.
- To minimize the stress if a consumer has a weak side, put the painful or weak arm or leg into a shirt, pullover, jacket, or pants first before the strong limb. When taking them off, take out the strong limb first.

Hair Care

- Short hairstyles can be easier to care for.
- Wash hair in the kitchen sink if the tub or shower is too difficult.
- Consider using one of the dry shampoo products found in drug stores in between washes if the consumer provides.