



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Personal Care for People with Dementia

Personal care means things like eating, bathing, dressing, brushing teeth, and using the bathroom. A person with dementia may need help with personal care. As dementia gets worse, they will need more and more help.

When helping with personal care for people with dementia, imagine what it might be like to be them. They might feel ashamed to need so much help. They might feel confused or scared. They might feel like they have no privacy.

To help with those feelings, be patient and gentle and try to have a sense of humor. It also helps to be creative. For example, for bathing it can help to put a picture in the shower of something the person likes. That might help them feel more relaxed when bathing. For dressing, if there is a piece of clothing the person likes, buy several of them so they can wear the same outfit every day. For eating, serve their favorite foods.

The table below shows how you can help in the early stage of dementia. On the other side of this page, it shows how you can help in the middle and late stages.

Giving Personal Care in the Early Stage of Dementia			
<i>What the Person Might Do</i>	<i>Helpful Things To Do</i>	<i>Giving Emotional Help</i>	<i>Keeping Safe</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can do most things, but... • Might sometimes forget to do personal care tasks like eating or bathing. • Might remember to do them, but forget <i>how</i> to do them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the same routine every day. • Allow more time to do things. • Label common items and places, like a sign on the bathroom door. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be encouraging. • Be gentle. • Avoid telling them they forgot something. • Avoid telling them they did something wrong. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install a shower chair. • Install grab bars in the bathroom. • Get a non-slip shower mat.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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Giving Personal Care in the Middle Stages of Dementia

<i>What the Person Might Do</i>	<i>Helpful Things To Do</i>	<i>Giving Emotional Help</i>	<i>Keeping Safe</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more reminders to do personal care. • Need more help with personal care. • Might resist help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up supplies before starting care activities. • Make things simple, like clothes without zippers or buttons. • Show the person what you want them to do. • If they become upset, stop. Wait a few minutes and try again. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the person be as independent as they can. Don't do the task for the person if they are trying to do it themselves. • Give simple instructions in a calm voice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never leave the person alone in the shower or tub. • Lower water temperature to avoid burns. • Clear clutter from the floor.

Giving Personal Care in the Late Stage of Dementia

<i>What the Person Might Do</i>	<i>Helpful Things To Do</i>	<i>Giving Emotional Help</i>	<i>Keeping Safe</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be completely dependent. • Need total care, not just help, with everything. • Might not be able to tell you if something hurts. • Might resist care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use signs and picture so the person can see what you want them to do. • Tell the person, step-by-step, what you are going to do. • Focus on the person you are helping, not the task you are doing. • Stay calm. Keep the person comfortable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be alert for moans or grunts that could mean something hurts. • Watch for facial expressions that could mean something hurts. • If you are causing discomfort, try something different —like a sponge bath instead of a shower. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never leave the person alone during personal care. • Use safe grooming tools, such as plastic combs instead of metal combs and electric razors instead of real razor blades.

Useful Websites

- More advice on personal care: <http://www.alz.org>
- Tips on bathing: <http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-bathing.asp>
- Tips on dressing: <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/dressing-grooming>

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Alzheimer's disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

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