



Gayle Wells Foundation™

for Early Onset Alzheimers & Care

Educating in Care & Compassion

Personal Care

Bathing

In the early stages of the disease, your loved one may still be capable of bathing. However, you may begin to notice that they are bathing less frequently, and then they may stop all together. This personal care activity can become frightening to them for the following reasons:

- Water can cause sensations to their skin (especially the head and face) that make them uncomfortable
- They may not be able to distinguish between hot and cold water
- As depth perception becomes impaired, stepping into the bathtub can be scary for them as they might not be able to judge the depth of bathtub, as bathtubs are all one color. Stepping into the bathtub could become a fall hazard for them.
- Being in the bathtub may make them feel closed in and claustrophobic

The following modifications may be of assistance to help your loved one with the bathing process:

- Do not argue or nag them to take a bath. This will cause them agitation and they will become resistant to any kind of help.
- It is not necessary for them to bathe every day. Try for every 2-3 days.
- Purchase a shower chair that can sit in the bathtub. There are shower chairs where part of the chair extends out of bathtub. This extension allows your loved one to sit on the chair and lift their legs over edge of the tub.
- Mark the water handles “Hot” and “Cold”.
- Make sure the temperature in the room is comfortable.
- Get as many things ready ahead of time as possible (i.e. soap, towels, change of clothes, etc.).
- If your loved one has a favorite soap or shower gel, make sure you have it. The scent may be familiar and bring back good memories.
- Try to establish and reinforce a routine. Bathing should happen at the same time every day at the time that is best for your loved one. Not at the time that is best for the care partner.
- Be creative and develop a different name for the activity instead of “bath”.

Lesson from Gayle: Gayle would call the nylon bathing sponge a ‘loofah’ and she loved the way it felt on her skin. Instead of saying to Gayle “let’s go get your bath”, Laura would say “Let’s go rub that loofah on your skin and then put on some of that lotion that you like.”



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- Go slowly and state what you are doing. For example, “Let’s just get your arm wet” and talk to them while you are washing their arm. You can make statements such as “doesn’t that feel good?” Then when you are finished with that arm, state “let’s go ahead and do the other arm too.” Speak in a calm demeanor the entire time. Engaging them in calm conversation can help take their mind off what is actually happening and they can focus on how nice it feels.
- If your loved one is modest, you can let them keep their underwear or shorts on while you wash the upper part of their body. Then they can put a shirt on and take their shorts off.
- It is important to be flexible and if you reach a point in the process where they have had enough, then stop. You may need to split the process into a couple of days.
- Most drugstores have disposable washcloths can be great to use for those days when your loved one is resistant to bathing. You could wipe down their arms and legs before they go to bed in a slow, relaxing way that is calming and comforting.

Dental

Dental care can be a challenging activity for your loved one as the Alzheimer’s progresses. Often times, they may lose the ability to understand what they are supposed to do with the toothbrush. They may no longer understand the phrase “brush your teeth”. Please do not lose patience with them. Here are some things that could help as you assist them with their dental care:

- Brush your teeth along with them – make it an activity for the two of you. Your loved one can mirror your actions, thereby maintaining the ability to brush their teeth independently for as long as possible.
- Set out their toothbrush for them. You may need to place the toothpaste on the toothbrush for them.
- If you notice your loved one showing a strained facial expression or making verbal sounds of discomfort when they are brushing their teeth, this may indicate oral discomfort. Contact your dentist for recommendations.
- If your loved one refuses to brush their teeth, explain the situation to your dentist. They should be able to provide you with some solutions to maintain your loved one’s oral care.



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Dressing

Dressing is a very important part of one's daily personal activities. Letting your loved one do as much as they can for as long as possible provides them with a sense of independence and accomplishment. As they start to need help with certain aspects of the dressing process, you can provide assistance, but let them continue everything else on their own. The following items may help your loved one navigate the activity of dressing:

- Place notecards with the words and/or pictures of the items on the drawers containing underwear, socks, pajamas, shorts, t-shirts, and other items that your loved one wears on a regular basis.
- Organize the closet so that it is free of clutter.
- In the closet, place like items together – pants, jeans, long-sleeved shirts, short-sleeved shirts, dresses, etc. This can help ease the process of finding clothes.
- If your loved one wishes to wear the same outfit, try getting a duplicate outfit or have similar options.
- Make sure that the clothes your loved one has are loose fitting and do not have difficult buttons or fasteners.
- The process of getting dressed will begin to take more time. Please do not rush your loved one.
- Compliment them on how nice they look.
- Keeping the environment calm can have a positive impact on your loved one. Minimizing distractions is important, but if your loved one enjoys listening to music or a TV program while getting dressed, then that can lend itself to a more relaxing and positive experience for your loved one.

Eating

As the disease progresses there will be difficulties with eating. It is not uncommon for individuals with early onset Alzheimer's disease to have an impaired sense of smell, which lessens one's appetite. Medications can also alter one's appetite and many times impact their taste buds. Also, they may not recognize hunger, so they will not eat, unless there is someone to help prepare meals and to eat with them. These tips can help maintain good nutrition for your loved one:

- Minimize distractions during meal time
- You can offer your loved one options on what they would like to eat, but it best to limit it to two choices. It can also be helpful to show them the options and let them pick the one they would like. If they are struggling with making a choice, then you can make the choice for them.
- Allow plenty of time; however long it takes them to eat, let them have that time



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- It is best to not ask your loved one if they are hungry. As the disease progresses, your loved one will lose the ability to recognize hunger and thirst. It is best to keep meals on a schedule and then present your loved one with snacks and beverages throughout the day to help maintain good nutrition and hydration
- There will come a time when your loved one will eat with their fingers. It is fine for them to do this. Keep in mind the most important thing is that they are eating. When this occurs, it will be easier for both of you, to prepare foods that are easy to eat with their fingers.
- As the disease progresses, it is not uncommon for metal silverware to become difficult for your loved one to use. The metal may taste strange and it can become difficult for them to open their mouth wide enough for the silverware. Using rubber spoons (i.e. baby spoons) are easier for them to eat from and the rubber is soothing to their mouth.
- Do not worry about table manners or how your loved one might mix their food together. None of that matters. The most important thing is that they are eating, however that now happens.
- It can be helpful to keep a list of the foods your loved one eats well and likes. While this can change through the progression of the disease, it is helpful to keep that list and to let them have the foods they like and will eat.

Grooming

As was discussed in the “Dressing” section, let your loved one continue their grooming rituals as long as they can safely do so. You can provide assistance by setting everything out for them, such as their makeup, hairbrushes, razor, shaving cream, etc. As the disease progresses, they may start skipping certain tasks or they may be unable to manage certain steps involved, as the process can become overwhelming and they forget how to do certain things.

You can help them by:

- Gently offering your assistance.
- Speak to them throughout the process with a calm demeanor.
- Compliment them on their looks as you are helping them with their grooming activities
- Replace disposable razors with electric razors (this recommendation is for both men and women)
- For females, if they are applying too much make-up, limit their choices



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Toileting

Toileting can be a very challenging and stressful time for the care partner, and a time of embarrassment and agitation for the person with early onset Alzheimer's disease. As difficult as it may be, reassure your loved one that they do not need to be embarrassed. There are some practical solutions to put into place to establish a toileting routine:

- Make it easy for your loved one to find the bathroom. Make sure the hallways and path to the bathroom are free of clutter.
- Placing a picture of a toilet on the bathroom door can help them identify which room to go to.
- As the disease progresses, your loved one may not recognize the urge to go to the bathroom. Set a routine of going to the bathroom when they wake up, every 2 hours during the day, and then again right before bedtime.
- Place nightlights in the bathroom.
- The time will come when your loved one will not be aware they need to go to the bathroom. If they are tugging on their clothing, pacing, or fidgeting, those could be signs that they need to use the bathroom.
- Accidents will occur. Do your best to be calm and understanding.
- Incontinence pads can be purchased at the drugstore. You can place those on top of the furniture and then place a sheet or washable furniture cover on top of the pad. This can help protect the furniture but not draw attention to the pads.
- When cleaning up, please make sure you wear gloves and wash your hands thoroughly.
- When your loved one can no longer use the toilet or a urinal, then you will need to purchase incontinence products. Pull-up briefs are similar to underwear and work well if your loved one is still ambulatory and moving around the house. Adult diapers are for those individuals that are in bed all of the time.
- Regardless of which kind you use, we recommend that you not refer to them as 'diapers'. Throughout the progression of the disease, it is important for your loved one to maintain their dignity. Call them whatever your loved one called their underwear (i.e. undies, drawers, etc.) Use the same terminology that they did.