

# A Guide on How to Give a Bed Bath



## Introduction

For someone who is weak or unable to get out of bed, a bed bath can be refreshing and soothing. It is also a good way to save energy for other activities and keep the skin in good condition.

Still, the idea of giving or receiving a bath for the first time can be intimidating. Remember, bathing is something we all do; there is no “right way,” or “wrong way”. These suggestions might help make both of you more comfortable.

## Before You Start...

- If pain is a concern, give pain medication and wait until it has had a chance to start working before beginning.
- Take a moment to think or talk about ways to make bath time more pleasant.
  - Music?
  - Warm towels?
  - Favorite soaps or lotions?
  - Things to talk about – old memories, funny stories, something important?
- Gather any supplies you might need before beginning. This will save you steps and time and help prevent falls.
- Prevent chilling and protect privacy by keeping any areas that are not being washed covered with towels or soft blankets. A flat flannel sheet is a good choice.
- Encourage the person receiving the bath to participate as much as possible.
- Place a laundry bag or hamper close by.
- Hold onto your sense of humor.
- Ask your hospice nurse or home health aide for helpful tips and supplies.

## Giving a Bed Bath

### Supplies:

- warm water
- basin
- bath gel or other clean rinsing soap
- wash cloths
- towels
- clean sheets
- lotion
- clean clothes



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Fill a basin about 2/3 full with warm water and place on a table near the bed on the side you will work from first. Place a clean wash cloth in the basin.

- If possible, adjust the bed to a comfortable working level. Adjust the head and foot to a comfortable level and lower the side rail.
- Help the person move toward your side of the bed.
- Begin with the face while the water is clean. Wash one area at a time – rinsing and drying thoroughly.
- Remove the clothing from the upper body and cover with a towel or light blanket.
- Wash the neck and upper body, rinse, pat dry and cover.
- Support the arm with your hand under the elbow. Wash shoulder, armpit and arms using long circular strokes. Rinse, pat dry, and cover.
- Wash the hand and gently clean under fingernails.
- Repeat with the other arm and hand.
- If the water has cooled, replace now with fresh warm water.
- Remove clothing from the lower body. Keep covered with towels, sheet, or light blanket. Uncover only the area being washed.
- Put a bath towel under the legs. Bend the knee and hold the leg with one arm.
- Wash with long, light strokes, rinse, pat dry and cover. Wash, rinse and dry the foot. Repeat with the other leg and foot.
- Help the person turn on his or her side facing away from you. Wash back and neck with light, long circular strokes. Rinse, pat dry, and cover. Apply lotion.
- Place a towel underneath the buttocks and roll onto the back. Wash or assist the person you are caring for in washing the genital area. Rinse, pat dry, remove damp towels, and cover.
- Apply lotion to skin or powder skin folds.
- Apply deodorant.
- Put on clean clothes and change the bed as needed.
- Offer mouth care and help brushing or combing hair.
- Lower the bed. Adjust the bed and pillows for comfort and raise any side rails.

Be sure to report any areas of concern to your hospice nurse as soon as possible. Do not rub any reddened or discolored areas.



## Learning New Care Skills

Just like any new skill, learning to assist someone else with hands-on personal care takes practice. Be patient with yourself. Ask lots of questions. Consider letting your hospice home health aides help out and share with you the lessons they have learned by caring for others. Remember not to do more than you feel safe doing. If you have any questions or worries, call your care team.

