



## Bathing without a Battle...

Providing personal care, particularly bathing a person with dementia, can be a challenge for both family and professional caregivers. It is not uncommon to see difficult behaviors occur during the bath or shower as the person with dementia may fight, kick, scream, bite or swear. These behaviors are often labeled as "resistiveness to care" when in fact, the person is trying to tell the caregiver, "No - please don't do this to me!" However, as the caregiver persists in this activity, the person has no other choice than to put up a fight. It is important to see these behaviors as "self-protective" because the person is confused and misinterpreting a very uncomfortable activity, and is therefore trying to protect him/herself. So, how can we get the person with dementia clean and reduce self-protective behaviors? Here are a variety of considerations:

- 1. Re-think the bathing experience** with the goal of making the bath/shower comfortable and pleasurable for the person. Determine how and when the person with dementia prefers to get clean and feel good! Utilize the favorite method of getting clean i.e., shower vs. bath, temperature of water, time of day, etc. (see Bathing Inventory)
- 2. Approach techniques** can set the context for the bathing experience. Rather than asking, "Do you want to take your bath now?" when the answer is likely to be "NO!" Try saying, "Let's get freshened up for the day!" Getting freshened up has a very different context than bathing.
- 3. Have the room ready to go** so that you can proceed with the bath/shower experience. Make sure the room is warm and that you use low lighting. Use a handheld showerhead and only wet one area at a time while keeping the person covered with a large towel or blanket. This technique will provide dignity and keep the person warm. Give a sponge bath to the person who doesn't like to get wet. Use a basin of warm water diluted with no rinse soap in order to eliminate the need to rinse.
- 4. Begin bathing in the least sensitive area first!** Most people with dementia do not like to have water in their faces so think about beginning to wash the legs and feet first, followed by the arms, trunk, peri area and then the face.
- 5. Save washing the hair until last** or consider washing the hair at a separate time. For ladies, a weekly trip to the beauty salon can be a much more pleasurable experience. Men might enjoy a weekly visit to the barber for a shave and hair trim. For those with fine, short hair, no

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## Bathing Inventory:

The Bathing Inventory may help you identify preferences and adaptations required to promote successful bathing.

### Bathing Preference

- What type of bath has been preferred?
- What time of day which the patient is preferred to bathe?
- How often does the patient bathe?
- What occasions trigger the need for a bath? (e.g. church, going out, etc.)

### Ability to bathe

- Does the person currently require help with bathing?
- If so, what kind of help?
- Can the person tell the difference between soap, shampoo, lotion, etc?
- Are adaptations such as shower chair, handheld showerhead, etc. needed?
- Are there any safety concerns such as unsteadiness, weakness, and fall risk?

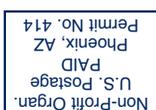
### Comfort during bathing

- Does the person become tired from bathing?
- Is there pain/discomfort during bathing?
- Are there any complaints of being too cold during a bath?
- Does the person become fearful, confused, frightened, call out or become angry?
- If yes, can he/she be consoled or distracted?

### Helpful bathing supplies:

- No Rinse Soap
- Large beach size towel
- Baby washcloths (soft for fragile skin)
- Baby wipes

There are many home care programs that provide "bath aides" to assist with personal care. Please call BAI if you would like more information.



*(When Words Fail Continued)*

rinse shampoo can be used by applying it to a wet washcloth and then running it gently through the hair.

**6. Distraction techniques** can also enhance the bathing experience.

Music that reflects the person's preference or singing old familiar songs can lighten the mood. Talking about the person's favorite topics can be helpful. Have the person hold onto something (not the handheld showerhead!) such as a towel, washcloth, bar of soap, etc. can provide distraction, especially while washing in the peri area. Consider giving the person something to eat – sweets are often a very pleasant way to distract while you are quickly at work.

Bathing can be a challenging experience for the person with dementia and caregiver alike. As you try a variety of these strategies, you should be able to come up with a bathing experience that can provide both pleasure and cleanliness for person with dementia.

## Ask The Expert

*Jan Dougherty, RN, MS*



Dear Jan:

My wife always prided herself in her appearance but over the past year it seems like she just doesn't care. She is likely to wear soiled clothing and when I ask her to take a shower she tells me that she has already done so. Sometimes she can go up to 3 weeks without a shower and then I have to force her to do so. It has really become a source of frustration for me because I want her to look her best. What can I do?

Signed,

Loving but Frustrated

Dear Loving (Husband):

As people with dementia progress into the moderate stage of the illness, there is often a loss of interest and initiative in overall personal care and outward appearance. It is common that the person will wear only select clothing and will be unaware or not care that clothing is dirty or soiled. Bathing can become overwhelming as it is a fairly complex task requiring multiple steps such as undressing, operating the bathtub/shower controls, using the right products to get clean, and redressing in appropriate attire. Some individuals can become frightened of the water which will necessitate new methods of getting clean.

While you want your wife to be clean and have an outwardly dignified appearance, you also want her to be comfortable while getting clean. You will be more successful if you are positively directive with her by saying, "Let's get prettied up for the day!" and then proceed to the bathroom which should be prepared to go. Have all the supplies laid out and the shower running with warm water. Say to her, "I have your favorite soap and shampoo ready for you. I just love how you smell when you use them!" You might ask her, "How can I help you?" or just begin to give her simple reminders to help her get through all the steps involved in bathing.

If your wife is fearful of the shower and refuses to get in, then shift your gears and fill the sink with warm water and have no rinse soap and washcloths ready to go. You may find that singing a favorite song or even having some favorite music playing on the radio or CD player may keep her distracted. Keep reminding her of your love and affection and have something special planned following the shower/bath even if it is watching a favorite TV show. Ladies generally like going to the hairdresser so this may be a good solution to getting her hair washed and styled each week. Schedule this activity during her best time of the day and then get into the habit of doing it each week.

Should your wife be resistant to allowing you to help her bathe, you may ask an adult child (particularly if you have a daughter) to help. Some families find that hiring a caregiver through a home care agency to give a bath is worth the money. This will typically cost about \$20-30/visit. Remember that no one ever died because of not getting a bath/shower. You may find that changing your approach, keeping her distracted and making the "getting clean" more comfortable will be successful.

## Our Mission

To end Alzheimer's disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families, and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research

## Tip on Brain Health

Long-term stress and anxiety can be a source of wear and tear on both body and mind. Scientists suggest that it may be possible to reduce stress and improve brain health with 20 minutes of relaxation a day. Yoga, prayer, deep breathing, Tai chi and guided imagery are just a few examples of ways to reduce your stress!

## July Beacon Bits

Take a look at the new BAI website –[www.banneralz.org](http://www.banneralz.org). You will find new videos that tell you more about the vision of BAI. You can look for upcoming classes and events and find back issues of the Beacon and more!

R.I.S.E. to Yoga is going strong and celebrating our 1st year anniversary! This chair yoga program provides 90-minutes of both fun and stress reduction for people with dementia and runs opposite of the Circle of Friends Support group. There is a \$10 fee for participating in the program with no advanced registration required. Participants tell us they look forward to this program and many have found new friendships. R.I.S.E. to Yoga and Circle of Friends meets the 2nd Thursday of each month from 12:30 – 2:00 pm on the BAI 3rd floor.

A new Early Stage Memory Loss Support group is meeting each month on the 2nd Friday from 1:00 – 2:30 pm in the BAI 3rd Floor conference room. The group is free of charge and no registration is required. Call Susy Favaro, MSW at (602) 839-6867 for more information.

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