

## How to Manage Bathing Difficulties

### Normal Changes related to Aging that Might Affect

#### Bathing

- Sweating decreases → skin dries out
- Skin thins, wrinkles, and is easier to tear
- Decreased fat tissue → they can become cold very easily.
- Decreased vision or hearing
- Postural changes

#### Perception of Bath Time

Bath time can be a very frightening time. They might be afraid of:

- Falling
- Being cold and uncovered
- Having water splashed into their face
- Lack of control
- Being left alone to figure out what they are supposed to do.

#### Lifelong Habits

Following lifelong habits will make bathing easier and more comfortable. It is important to consider:

- How do they usually prefer to bathe?  
Shower, tub bath, or sponge bath?
- How often did they used to bathe?
- When did they usually like to bathe?  
Morning or night?
- Shaving (men): did he like to shower before, during, or after bathing?
- Shaving (women): did she like to shave their legs and underarms? If so, how & when?

#### Providing Assistance with Bathing

Let them do as much as they can and help with anything they cannot finish on their own. Most people should be able to help by holding a wash cloth.

It is important to allow as much privacy as is safely possible. When undressing, cover them with a towel.

Consider the environment:

- Do they need slip mats for the tub?
- Do they need a shower chair?
- Avoid using oils → slipping hazard.
- Make sure that the room is set up with everything you need before inviting them to wash up.

#### Helpful Interventions

- Create a schedule for bathing and follow it.
- Provide for personal choice and control: give them a choice between two things.
- Tell them what you would like them to do. Use simple commands.
- Give them a small warm washcloth to wash their face.
- If hair washing is distressing, separate it from bathing. Consider washing it in the sink, using a rinse less soap, or take a trip to the beauty parlor.
- Ensure that the bathroom is pleasant and inviting: make sure it is warm enough, utilize familiar scents & bright warm colors.
- It is not always necessary to take a bath every day. Three times a week might be okay if supplemented

#### Identifying the Problem

If none of these steps help, try the following process to change problem behaviors.

1. What is the problem?
2. What happens right before?
3. What happens right after?
4. Make changes to what happens right before or right after the problem behavior to change the problem.
5. Did it work? If not, try making another change.

#### References

- Sifton, C. B. (2004). Navigating the Alzheimer's Journey. Health Professions Press, Inc: Fredericksburg, VA.