

# Basic Care: Bathing

## What is happening

As illness progresses, patients often become weaker and may need help with bathing and personal hygiene.

Good skin care and hygiene can:

- Improve comfort
- Reduce skin irritation and infection
- Promote dignity and well-being

The hospice team will usually assist with bathing during scheduled visits, but caregivers may also choose to help.

## How often is bathing needed?

A full bath is usually needed:

- About 2–3 times per week
- Or more often if needed for comfort or cleanliness

## Supplies you may need

- Towels
- Washcloths
- Mild, fragrance-free soap
- Basin with warm water
- Disposable gloves
- Lotion or moisturizer
- Clean clothing or linens if needed

Towels can also help:

- Protect bedding
- Maintain warmth and privacy

## Preparing for the bath

Before starting:

- Wash your hands and put on gloves if needed

- Explain each step slowly and calmly
- Close doors or curtains for privacy
- Make sure the room is warm and comfortable

If using a hospital bed:

- Raise the bed to a comfortable working height if possible

## **General bathing principles**

### **Keep the patient warm and covered**

- Wash one body area at a time
- Keep the rest of the body covered with a towel or blanket

### **Use gentle washing**

- Use warm—not hot—water
- Test water temperature first
- Avoid harsh scrubbing
- Dry the skin gently and thoroughly

### **Change water as needed**

Replace the water if it:

- Becomes cool
- Looks dirty
- Becomes too soapy

## **Suggested bathing order**

### **Face and neck**

- Use warm water only on the face if possible
- Use a clean area of the washcloth for each eye
- Wipe gently from the inner eye outward

### **Arms, chest, and abdomen**

- Wash one arm at a time using gentle downward strokes
- Rinse and dry carefully

## **Legs and feet**

- Wash one leg at a time
- Dry carefully, especially between the toes

## **Back and buttocks**

- Help the patient turn gently if able
- Use pillows or assistance for support and safety

## **Groin and genital area**

- Change to clean water before washing this area
- Wash gently from front to back
- Dry carefully to prevent skin irritation

# **Skin and comfort care after bathing**

After bathing:

- Apply fragrance-free lotion if needed to reduce dryness
- Inspect the skin for:
  - Redness
  - Open areas
  - Bruising
  - Skin breakdown

You may also:

- Clean under fingernails
- Check toenails if needed

# **Encourage participation when possible**

If the patient is able:

- Encourage them to help with washing or drying

Even small participation may help:

- Maintain movement and flexibility
- Preserve independence and dignity
- Provide a sense of control

# **Common concerns**

## **Getting cold**

To help prevent chilling:

- Wash one area at a time
- Keep the patient covered
- Change cool water promptly

## **Wet bedding**

Use towels under body areas and avoid overly wet washcloths.

## **Refusing bathing**

Some patients may resist bathing because of:

- Fatigue
- Depression
- Memory loss or confusion
- Feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable

Gentle reminders, reassurance, and a predictable routine may help.

Discuss ongoing refusal or emotional concerns with the hospice team.

## **When to call hospice**

- New skin breakdown or sores appear
- Bathing becomes unsafe or too difficult
- Significant pain occurs during movement or bathing
- Signs of depression or distress worsen
- You are unsure how to reposition or clean safely