

Tip Sheet # 21

Assisting the Stroke Survivor with Bathing, Dressing, or Going to the Bathroom



What about helping the stroke survivor with personal care?

After a stroke, survivors may need help with bathing, dressing, or going to the bathroom. Some survivors and caregivers may feel embarrassed at first. Open communication is important. Talk with the survivor about how you can help. Listen to the survivor's feelings about these activities, and what they need from you. Talk with a therapist about how to assist the survivor. Encourage the survivor to do as much as possible on their own.

- Personal care after a stroke may be difficult at first.
- Normal activities will take more time.
- Encourage the survivor to do as much as possible by him or herself.
- Familiar tasks can be done, but in new ways.
- Skills may come back in time or get better with practice.

Bathing Tips

- Ask the occupational therapist about the kind of help the survivor needs.
 - Some survivors need someone close by “just in case.”
 - Other survivors need help with part or all of their entire bath.
- Ask about special equipment that may be helpful.
 - Bath benches or shower chairs
 - Hand-held shower heads
 - Grab bars
 - Rubber bathmats or non-skid strips in the tub or shower
 - Long handled brushes or sponges
- Shaving

- Stroke survivors who are taking “blood thinners” should use electric razors rather than straight or disposable razors.
- **Bathing Tips**
 - Get everything ready first.
 - Make sure the bathroom is warm.
 - Pump bottles for liquid soap help in getting soap on a washcloth. Soap-on-a-rope can be helpful.
 - Thinner washcloths are easier to manage than thick ones.
 - Bath mitts made out of washcloths are helpful.
 - Showers are safer than bathtubs. A shower chair might be needed.
 - Use a non-skid bathmat rather than one made of terrycloth or other fabric.
 - Help the survivor soap or wash their body first, then have the survivor use a handheld shower to finish. Gives them a sense of accomplishment.
 - Avoid closing your eyes while shampooing or washing. Closing your eyes can make you lose your balance and fall.
 - Keep a chair outside the shower to sit on while drying off.
- ***Encourage routine trips to the hairdresser or barber. Call ahead to make sure the facility is wheelchair accessible.***



Dressing Tips

- Practice with the occupational therapist and the survivor.
 - Learn about dressing aids, such as long handled shoe horns and elastic shoelaces. Clothes with elastic waistbands make it easier than zippers and buttons.
- Encourage the survivor to dress in regular clothes every day. Wearing pajamas during the day may make the survivor feel as if he or she is sick.
- Undressing hints

- When helping the survivor undress, take clothing off of the good side first. Then, slide the clothes off of the paralyzed side.
- Clothing that has to go over the head may be difficult to get off.
- To remove a shirt, grab the shirt at the base of the neck with the survivor's strong hand, then have them lift it over their head.
- Dressing hints
 - Let the survivor choose what they want to wear.
 - Help them lay out clothes in the order they will be put on. The first thing the survivor needs should be on top of the pile.
 - It is easier to put clothes on if the survivor is sitting up.
 - Put the sleeve or pants leg on the paralyzed side first. Then put clothes on the good side.
 - Zippers and Velcro are easier to work with than buttons. Elastic waistbands are easier too.



Dental Tips

- Ask the occupational therapist if the survivor needs help with tooth brushing.
- Look for products that make tooth brushing easier.
 - Buy toothpaste in pump-style tubes or with flip-top lids.
 - Buy dental floss “toothpicks” or tie the floss in a loop.
 - Make the toothbrush easier to handle. Wrap it with a sponge or rubber ball. If you need the handle longer, tie a ruler to the toothbrush.
 - Try an electric toothbrush.
- Watch for food that “pockets” on the paralyzed side of the mouth.
- Encourage regular trips to the dentist for teeth cleaning (usually every 6 months).

Bathroom Tips

- Most toilets are only 16 inches tall. A raised toilet seat will be helpful.

- Grab bars need to be installed beside the toilet. Put them at a 45° angle. **Replace towel racks with grab bars.** Survivors may mistake a towel rack for a grab bar and may fall.
- At night, a urinal or bedside commode might be helpful. *Ask the therapist for advice.*
- If the survivor is in a wheelchair, he or she may need help getting on or off the toilet.
 - Place the wheelchair as close to the toilet as possible. Lock the wheels.
 - The survivor's unaffected or strongest side should be nearest the toilet.
 - Have survivor use the grab bar to stand up.
 - Loosen clothing while survivor is standing.
 - Make sure toilet paper is within reach.

When do I need to contact a professional about personal care?



- The occupational therapist or home health nurse can give you ideas if you and the survivor are having problems with personal care.
- Call the health professional if you notice any health-related problems while helping the survivor with personal care.
 - Watch for rashes, skin problems, or increased pain.

Where do I find more information about helping with personal care?

- Talk with the home health nurse about how to help with personal care.
- Check with the library for books about home health nursing care.
- See **Tip Sheet #20 Learning how to help the stroke survivor walk, transfer to a wheelchair, move about, or avoid falls** for tips on how to help the survivor move while doing personal care.

- See **Tip Sheet #8 Where to find resources** if you think the survivor needs someone to come in to help with personal care.
- See **Tip Sheet #2 What is a stroke and What to expect at home** for tips on how to make the home handicap accessible.