

# The ABCs of Bathing

Establish a safe and comfortable bathing experience for your residents. »BY DONNA COATE, RN

**S**taff members who help with bathing can turn a personal care routine into a dignified and safe experience residents will actually look forward to. There are three steps to put into practice that contribute to a safer, more comforting bathing experience.

## A IS FOR ASSESS

Before initiating a bath, the caregiver must perform two distinct assessments. First, make sure the resident is aware that a bath or shower is scheduled. Take note of any change in condition and reschedule the bath if needed.

DAVE PERELLO



Check the resident's care plan, which will provide significant safety information, such as mobility status, behavior patterns and any

special preferences the person may have. Don't become complacent and fail to refer to the care plan regularly. The care plan is derived from the latest professional assessments and can change at a moment's notice. Second, assess the bathing environment and equipment prior to the bath.

Make sure the floor is dry. Falls are a leading cause of injury in long-term care. Something as simple as a wet floor could cause anyone to lose balance and sustain an injury. Gather all needed supplies, such as towels, face cloths, soap and any special adaptive equipment as noted in the resident's care plan. Make sure equipment is available, in working order and that you are trained to use it. Coordinate equipment needs with your co-workers if needed. Ensure that the call light system working.

## B IS FOR BEING PRESENT

Never leave a person in the bathtub or shower unattended. There are several additional actions caregivers should take while being present in the washroom. ▶

Many elderly people have thinning skin that tears easily. Using a soft sponge or cloth in a gentle cleansing motion helps to keep skin healthy and intact.

Constantly monitor the water temperature. Reduced skin thickness, peripheral neuropathies and a decline in cognition are just a few examples of conditions that may place a resident at an increased risk for sustaining a skin burn. While water temperatures are usually controlled by regulators, water that feels warm to you may seem hot to the person you're assisting.

Observe the resident's tolerance throughout the bath or shower. If, at any time, he or she reports feeling ill or appears sick, stop bathing and use the call light to obtain additional assistance.

## C IS FOR COMFORT

We have all experienced the joy of a relaxing bath or shower in the privacy of our own homes. Try to replicate that experience for residents. Implementing bathing preferences

provides for a person-centered experience that can diminish stress levels. Start by simply talking to the residents and asking about their preferences. Do they prefer to keep their hair dry, or do they like a scalp massage during a shampoo?

Relaxing music can be very therapeutic and serves to enhance the bathing experience.

Skin lotions are a great addition to any bathing regime and provide skin-to-skin touch that is healthy and beneficial. Try a gentle hand massage and witness the relaxing effect it provides. Scented lotions and soaps can add another sensory element to the experience, but be sure the person can use them as many people have allergies or unfavorable skin reactions to scented products.

Use a soft bath sponge or cloth. Many elderly people have thinning skin that tears easily. Using a soft sponge or cloth in a gentle

cleansing motion helps to keep skin healthy and intact.

Respect resident privacy. Use privacy curtains during bathing and ensure the person is not exposed while transporting to and from the bath/shower room.

All of these elements—assessing resident and the bathing environment, being present during the entire bathing experience and providing comfort measures—work together to promote a safe and dignified bathing experience. ■

**Donna Coate** is president of The 12 Minute Trainer, Canton, Mich.

Go to: [www.advanceweb.com/LTC](http://www.advanceweb.com/LTC)

Renew your **FREE** subscription right now! Look for the photo of the magazine on the right side of the home page and click on **Subscribe**.

