



A person living with dementia may need help with daily activities. Activities can include dressing, toileting, grooming, bathing, eating, or walking. As the disease progresses, you might wonder how to help the person, while maintaining their independence and dignity. Your approach is key. Below are strategies to help:

Guiding principles:

- Stick to a daily routine or schedule.
- Create a comfortable, welcoming environment free of clutter.
- Set up the activity and start doing it yourself (e.g., brushing your teeth), then invite the person to join.
- Avoid hurrying them.
- Give them simple choices. Two options work best (e.g., soup or sandwich for lunch? Blue or black pants today? Loofah or washcloth?).
- Use the person's name when giving cues and encouragement.
- Avoid explaining why the person needs to do it.
- Let the person make mistakes; the goal is to connect, not correct.
- Watch for frustration and take a break if needed. Try again later.
- Adjust or provide additional support as the person's dementia progresses.

Helping the person through the stages:

Early stages: At first, the person may only need a cue or a reminder to get things started. Later, they may just need someone around in case they run into challenges.

- Don't take over right away.
- Give the person as much privacy as possible in the washroom or when changing.
- Avoid saying "remember" when prompting the person.

Mid stages: If you notice they need more assistance, ask, "Is it okay if I help you?"

- Help break the activity down into smaller steps.
- Explain the process as you help them. Use simple sentences.
- Provide verbal or physical cues to help the person stay on track.
- Stay at eye-level. Don't hover over the person as you help.
- Let the person know if you are going to touch them.
- Provide assistive tools and encourage their use (e.g., Install grab bars, a bath chair, a walker, a call button, sanitary products or a commode at bedside).



Late stages: After a while, the person may need help with all aspects of the task.

- Keep the person involved (e.g., ask them to hold the washcloth and guide their hands).
- Connect with the person through scent, smell, gentle touch, or music.
- Cover the person with a blanket/cape/towel when dressing or bathing.
- Don't rush.

Tips for specific activities:

Dressing:

- Choose comfortable clothing that easily slips on and off.
- Choose Velcro and zippers instead of buttons or ties.
- Choose non-slip shoes for balance and stability.

Eating/Feeding

- Choose coloured plates to help the person see their food.
- Forget about etiquette. Choose finger foods if needed.
- If they seem overwhelmed, limit the types or amount of food on one plate.

Toileting:

- Make the washroom easy to find. Use signage with symbols, keep the door open.
- Choose non-restrictive clothing that can be easily removed.
- Limit fluid intake in the evening to prevent accidents at night.

Mobility:

- Walk slightly in front of the person and use gestures to guide them if needed.
- Remove lighting that causes glare or shadows on floors. Use nightlights or motion sensing lights at night.
- Choose easily recognizable furniture. Remove furniture with wheels.

Bathing:

- Choose the person's favorite and most familiar toiletry brands.
- Make sure the room is warm. Test the water temperature and pressure in advance.
- Be gentle and avoid scrubbing as skin may be sensitive.

Video Resources on How to help with...

Getting dressed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wn1OefQtoow>

Redirecting to the washroom: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpXeeFZ2jAM>

Eating or drinking (late stages): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNPAESrllgQ>

Brushing their teeth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gLrH8mioCw>

Bathing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKT9YIVPREE>

Sitting down: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_5lYvkraGo

Preventing falls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahrpNV0XG54>

Enabling Abilities: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t-KkIq_uew&list=PLqiA3A3X-xLlqa8QwqUFCxgLTLr1hLG53&-index=8&t=os

Further reading:

Dementia care practice recommendations: https://www.alz.org/national/documents/phase_4_home_care_recs.pdf

Progressive support for activities of daily living: https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/58/suppl_1/S74/4816734

Dementia care notes: <https://dementiacarenotes.in/caregivers/toolkit/adl/#:~:text=The%20term%20Activities%20of%20Daily,%2C%20grooming%2C%20toileting%2C%20and%20eating>

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