

Activities of Daily Living & Other Problems

Dressing

Our clothes are very much part of our personality. Enabling someone with dementia to choose what they wear and retain their particular style of dressing is a way of helping them to preserve their own identity for as long as possible. As dementia progresses, the person may need more assistance with dressing. Here are some suggestions.

Dressing is a private activity for most of us and one where we are used to making our own decisions about what to wear. If people with dementia need assistance with dressing, it should be offered in a tactful and sensitive way to enable them to maintain their dignity and make their own choices for as long as they can.

It is important to allow plenty of time if you are helping someone to dress so that neither of you feels rushed. Try to use the opportunity to communicate about what you are doing and anything else of interest. If you can make it an enjoyable activity the person with dementia is more likely to feel relaxed and confident.

Encourage independence

Encourage the person to remain independent and dress themselves for as long as they can. Ways of helping may include:

- Laying out clothes in the order the person will put them on.
- Removing dirty clothes to prevent confusion.
- Reminding them which garment goes on next or handing them the appropriate clothes.
- Giving instructions in very short steps, when someone is more confused, such as, 'Now put your arm through the sleeve'.
- Being tactful if someone puts something on the wrong way round. On the other hand, you may both be able to have a good laugh.

- If the person with dementia lives on their own, steps such as labelling drawers with their content or putting whole outfits together for a particular day may be helpful.

General tips

- Make sure the room is warm.
- Try to encourage the person to use the toilet before getting dressed.
- Try to follow the routine they are used to. They may prefer to put on all their underwear first or completely dress their top and then their bottom half.
- If they resist your efforts to help, it may be better to leave them for a little while rather than cause distress. They may be more amenable if you try again a little later.
- The person may not be able to tell you whether they are hot or cold. Several layers of thin clothing may be better than one thick layer. You can then suggest removing one layer if it gets too warm.

Choice

Ask the person what they would like to put on wherever possible. People with dementia need the dignity of having some choice in what they wear. However, too many options could be confusing. It may be better to make suggestions one at a time. If the person lives on their own and has lots of clothes select those they are most likely to wear and put them in an accessible place. It will then be easier for the person to choose.



Throw out or put into storage clothing that is either seldom or never worn. Reducing the number of choices a person can make can make the task of dressing much easier. Eliminate unneeded accessories.

Buying clothes

If you are buying clothes for the person with dementia, take them with you, wherever possible, so that they can choose the style and colours they prefer.

- Check their size. They may have lost or put on weight without you realising it.
- Look for clothes that are machine washable and need little ironing, as this will save time.
- Look for clothes which are easy for the person to manage, particularly if they are living on their own. For example, larger neck openings and front fastenings or no fastenings at all.
- If you are caring for a woman, front fastening bras are easier for you both to manage. Never let her go without a bra as this could lead to soreness and discomfort. Avoid self-supporting stockings, as these can sometimes cause circulation problems.
- For men, boxer shorts may be easier to manage than Y-fronts.
- Shoes with laces may be hard to manage. Well-fitting slip-on shoes may help the person to remain independent a little longer.
- Slippers should not be worn for more than a few hours as they do not offer enough support.

Adaptations

You may be able to adapt some clothes to make them easier to put on and take off.

- Longer zips are always helpful and velcro fastenings are easier than buttons or hooks if the person can get used to the way Velcro works.
- You can sometimes replace shoelaces with elastic.

Changing clothes

Some people may be reluctant to undress, even to go to bed, or to change clothes. You may have to use a variety of strategies to persuade them to change. For example, you may need to remove dirty clothing and substitute fresh clothing when they are washing. Or the person may agree to change because someone is visiting or because you would like to see them in something new. Try to find an opportunity without causing the person distress. Make sure they change their underwear frequently.

Bizarre clothing

As long as it does no harm, it is probably better to accept rather bizarre clothing or clothing that is out of place rather than have a confrontation. If someone is determined to wear a hat in bed or a heavy coat in summer, try where possible to respect their choice.

Other aspects of grooming

Help the person with their hair once they are dressed. Women may like make-up if they are used to it, or a dab of perfume. If someone likes wearing brooches or beads, this may be another opportunity for choice, and if they enjoy having their nails painted, you might do this at some point in the day.

Men may need reminders or help with shaving, and eventually you may need to do it for them. If they use an electric razor, they will probably be able to manage for longer.

Compliments

Helping someone with dementia to look nice is an important way of maintaining their confidence. Compliment the person on the way they look and encourage them to be proud of their appearance.