

Get Ready for Grooming

Most people take great pride in maintaining their appearance. For individuals with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias, grooming tasks that were once simple such as combing hair, shaving and brushing teeth can become extremely complex ordeals. They may look at a comb or razor and have no idea what to do with it; they may have lost their ability to sequence tasks; or they may be experiencing emotions like fear, resistance or anxiety that can sabotage their personal care efforts. These tips can help ease the process:

- **Ensure a proper setting.** An environment conducive to the activity at hand can help boost a person's concentration and cooperation. Make sure the area is a comfortable temperature, is free of distractions, and has plenty of light. Also remember that privacy counts.
- **Adjust grooming tools.** Making the switch to safer, more effective supplies can help prevent injuries and simplify the process. Options include using an electric shaver as opposed to a traditional razor. You can also purchase items like foam grips for toothbrushes and hair washing trays or try different products like dry shampoo.
- **Develop a routine.** Try to perform tasks in the same order and at the same time each day. Also, doing familiar activities can be comforting to someone with Alzheimer's disease. Also consider continuing past habits. If someone is accustomed to going to the barber or beauty shop every week, keep it up if possible.
- **Keep it simple.** The ability to multi-task is difficult for someone with Alzheimer's disease. So it is likely to be easier to accomplish a task by telling a person what to do one step at a time, using a quiet, calm tone and smiling.
- **Demonstrate techniques.** Visual cues can move the process along, especially when communication skills diminish. Illustrate what to do with a comb by combing your own hair, or with a toothbrush by brushing your own teeth. Then encourage the person to copy your behavior.
- **Build on a person's strengths.** Encourage the person to handle self-care that is still within abilities and do not show discouragement or lose patience if the task cannot be performed. Teamwork may be helpful. Perhaps you need to apply the toothpaste, but then the person with dementia can carry out the brushing.
- **Eliminate surprises.** Explain what you are doing if you have to complete a task for the person with dementia. Say "I'm going to cut your nails."

- **Select favorite items.** Let the person select and apply preferred products, such as cologne, make-up or toothpaste. Giving an individual with dementia input adds an element of independence.
- **Be creative.** A technique that worked one day may backfire the next. This is due to the progressive nature of the disease. You have to be creative in your approach. For example, one study found it effective to use wet wash clothes or to pour water from a pitcher rather than use a spray to rinse a person's hair.
- **Be patient.** Understand that the activity may take a while so be sure to allow enough time. Rushing the process can stress both you and the person you are caring for.
- **Set realistic standards.** Recognize that perfection is not always possible. If shaving becomes too difficult, for example, it's okay to grow a beard. If necessary, skip the non-essential tasks in favor of concentrating on crucial grooming like oral hygiene.
- **Prepare in advance.** Have everything ready for grooming before hand. The right supplies can limit confusion, simplify grooming and reduce stress.

For more information on caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease or dementia visit our website at www.livefreehomehealthcare.com.