

Personal care skills: Tips to make you an excellent caregiver

Current, evidence-based training and education

This evidence-based training article was produced by Freiberg Press Inc.

Get this same quality training and education monthly with *Nurse Aide/VIP and Alzheimer's Care Guide*.

For more information:
www.care4elders.com

For over 30 years:
Excellence in Caregiver Education!

Copyright 2013 by Freiberg Press Inc.
May not be reproduced in any form without permission.

Notice: We attempt to be as accurate as possible, but the information contained here should not be implemented without checking current guidelines from your own medical and supervisory personnel.

Personal care involves the basic caregiving that you do every day, for all of your elders: bathing, grooming, toileting, dressing, and more.

Doing these activities with your elders is often not as simple or easy as you might think, especially if the elder has Alzheimer's or other problem.

But there are some easy-to-do tips that can help you a lot.

Person-centered care

First off, let's discuss "person-centered care," as this is extremely important to you in developing successful skills in your personal caregiving activities.

Person centered care means providing care that respects your elders' wishes, preferences and needs involving all aspects of their care.

Person-centered care involves:

- treating each of the elders in your care as unique individuals;
- looking at life from their perspective;
- providing them with their preferred activities and ways of doing things;
- communicating frequently, with them, all day long, every day;
- treating them as though you're happy to be there, and happy they're with you. Always.

Current, evidence-based training and education

Personal care involves the basic caregiving that you do every day, for all of your elders: bathing, grooming, toileting, dressing, and more.

Regulations require it!

Federal regulations and guidelines now require that elders receive person-centered care: that is care organized around the needs of the individual, rather than those of the nursing home, hospital or other setting.

CMS guidelines specifically state that person-centered caregiving "refers to the idea that each resident has a personal identity and history that involves more than just their medical illnesses or functional impairments."

According to the CMS, as a core part of person-centered care, elders should be enabled, as much as possible, to choose what to do during the day, when, and how.

They should also be able to decide such things as:

- when to get up from, and go to, bed;
- what to wear;
- when, where, and with whom to have their meals;
- what to eat and drink;
- when and how to be bathed;
- when to receive visitors; and
- which leisure activities they want to be engaged with.

Therefore, you should always do all you can to honor their personal preferences in all of your personal care activities for each of your residents, every day!

Take your time!

Says nursing home consultant Garda Cuthbert RN: "The wrong way to do your personal care-giving: Look upon it as a chore; rush through it as fast as you can; frown a lot; don't speak to your elders; be a grouch.

"The right way: Look upon it as an important time of socialization with your elders; take your time; converse with them; be pleasant; smile!"

Reason: Those visits with your elders provide them with looked-forward-to social time with you... a time for friendly conversation and a bit of socializing.

Many of your elders get very few visitors, so they look forward to your visits very much, and want to enjoy their time with you.



Toileting

- Always keep in mind that abilities will differ from elder to elder.
- If your elder can use the toilet, make sure there are grab bars available to help in getting up and down.
- A toilet riser seat also helps.
- Encourage toileting every 3 to 4 hours during the day.

"Look upon personal care as an important time of socialization with your elders."

- Ask your elder to try to empty their bladder again by waiting a moment after the first voiding and then trying again.

In some cases, letting your men who have enlarged prostates void twice... with a 5 minute wait in between... can be very helpful in helping them empty their bladders more completely.

- For elders who are incontinent have a routine for taking them to the bathroom and stick to it as closely as possible.

For example, take the elder to the bathroom every 3 hours or so during the day. Don't wait for them to ask.

- Watch for signs that the elder may have to go to the bathroom, such as restlessness or pulling at clothes. Respond quickly.
- Be understanding when accidents occur. Stay calm and reassure the person if he or she is upset.

Try to keep track of when accidents happen to help plan ways to avoid them.

- To help prevent nighttime accidents, limit certain types of fluids—such as those with caffeine—in the evening.
- If you are going to be out with the elder, plan ahead.

Know where restrooms are located, and have them wear simple, easy-to-remove clothing. Take an extra set of clothing along in case of an accident.

Important: You should never allow your elders to be in wet or soiled clothes. This can have a major negative impact on their self-esteem, socializing and quality of life.

Plus, it's a major cause of pressure ulcers, which is one of the worst things that can happen to an elder, and a major cause of death and suffering in longterm care.

Oral hygiene

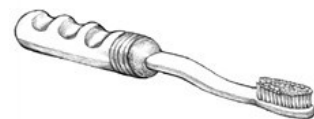
- If your elder can help, build up the toothbrush handle with tape and gauze 4x4's to make it easier for them to use.

If necessary, put the toothpaste on the brush and help with the movement of going back and forth. Electric toothbrushes may be helpful.

- If your elder has difficulty with oral hygiene, toothpaste, and so on, you can brush the teeth for the elder using a dry toothbrush and not putting any liquids into the mouth.

Or you can use pre-moistened swabs to clean away any debris.

- Always inspect the lips of your elder – one thing that often goes unnoticed is dry or chapped lips. Apply a lubricant as necessary.
- If your elder has dentures, brush them with denture cleanser and soak them over night with a denture cleansing solution.



You should never allow your elders to be in wet or soiled clothes.

Here's what's so important about oral care: Research shows that bacteria can get into the bloodstream through the mouth and cause serious problems for an elder, including heart attack, heart failure and stroke.

So regular oral care is one of the most important things you can do for the health and wellbeing of your elders.

Personal hygiene

This involves things like washing under the arms, applying deodorant (yes, elders do sweat and need deodorant) and cleaning the genital area.

If the elder can help, get the materials ready (basin, soap, wash cloths, towel and deodorant) and leave the room. Or you can help set up the elder in the bathroom.

If your elder cannot help, you must perform the personal hygiene for him or her.

Be sure you do this regularly, as you want to keep your elders clean, at all times.

Grooming

This includes washing the face and hands, brushing hair, shaving (women often have chin hairs), trimming beards, moustaches, and eyebrows, and applying makeup as desired.

Some men and women have nose hair that needs to be trimmed on a regular basis.

Bushy eyebrows and thick nose hairs are embarrassing for both men and women.

Important: Your elders want to look as nice as possible each day, just like anyone does.

It's an important part of providing them with a good quality of life since looking good certainly does a lot to boost their self-esteem and quality of life.

So do all you can to keep your elders looking their best each and every day!

Your elders always want to look their best, just like anyone does!



Your elders should be able to choose which type of bath they prefer.

Bathing

First off, it's important to note that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Guidelines state that your elders should be able to choose which type of bath they prefer.

This is for two reasons: giving them as much choice as possible is a major part of person-centered care; plus, their choice of bath can help reduce problem behaviors during bathing, especially with your Alzheimer's elders.

There are several recommended ways to bathe an elder, depending upon cognitive and physical ability.

Most elders do not need to bathe on a daily basis. Generally, their skin is dry and daily bathing only aggravates the condition.

Some elders do not like either a shower or tub bath. For these elders, a properly done bed bath can replace the need for a shower or a tub bath.

The key to any bath is to have all supplies ready, a warm area for any type of bath, and knowledge of what the elder prefers.

Have clean clothes ready for after the bath and towels available to dry the hair and cover them, to prevent chilling.

Allow the resident to wash what he or she can, but be ready to help with hard-to-reach places.

And be sure you always protect the privacy of your elder – even if you feel the need to hurry.

CMS regulations require that you give your elders the same type of privacy that you would want... including those elders with Alzheimer's.

CMS regulations require that you give your elders the same type of privacy that you would want... including those with Alzheimer's

Dressing: Give them choices

Here's an important point that you need to know about dressing your elders:

Let them choose what they want to wear, as much as possible... and that includes your elders with Alzheimer's disease, who are still able to make choices.

This is for two reasons: Giving your elders choices is an important part of providing a high-quality-of-life person centered care, which is a part of CMS Guidelines.

Plus, it can significantly help increase their self-esteem, and make them feel much happier.

If your elder is unable to, choose something from their closet and ask for their approval. Or, give them 2-3 choices to select from.

Clothing needs to be easy to put on and take off. Elastic waists are easier than belts. Understand, though, that many men still want to wear belts or suspenders.

Many women still want to wear a bra or a camisole. Let your elder dress as he or she wants to.



You should let your elders choose what they want to wear, as much as possible.

Let them do as much as possible

Let your elder do as much dressing as possible, and help as needed. Remember to provide the necessary assistive devices and always dress a weak side first.

Even for your Alzheimer's elders, it's a good idea to let them do as much of their own dressing as possible.

If they can help, research shows that it can significantly reduce frustrations and problem behaviors.

And they can help choose their wardrobe, too. As the disease advances, simply give them only a few items to choose from each time.

Eating

First off, keep in mind that CMS guidelines state that your elders should have a choice of foods that they prefer each day, plus the availability of snacks throughout the entire day... just like a home environment would provide.

Eating for your Alzheimer's elders can be challenging. Here's what the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommend for those elders:

--View mealtimes as opportunities for social interaction and success for the person with Alzheimer's.

--Try to be patient and avoid rushing, and be sensitive to confusion and anxiety.

--Aim for a quiet, calm, reassuring mealtime atmosphere by limiting noise and other distractions.

--Maintain familiar mealtime routines, but adapt to the person's changing needs.

--Give the person food choices, but limit the number of choices. Try to offer appealing foods that have familiar flavors, varied textures, and different colors.

--Serve small portions or several small meals throughout the day. Make healthy snacks, finger foods, and shakes available.

In the earlier stages of dementia, be aware of the possibility of overeating.

--Choose dishes and eating tools that promote independence. If the person has trouble using utensils, use a bowl instead of a plate, or offer utensils with large or built-up handles. Use straws or cups with lids to make drinking easier.

--Encourage your elders to drink plenty of fluids throughout the day to avoid dehydration.

--As the disease progresses, be aware of the increased risk of choking because of chewing and swallowing problems.

--Maintain routine dental checkups and daily oral health care to keep the mouth and teeth healthy.



View mealtimes as opportunities for social interaction and success for the person with Alzheimer's.

Activities

These are the fun things your elders like to do.

And you need to remember this basic CMS regulation about your elders' activities:

They should be provided many choices on the types of activities they want to do, and based on their interests and talents.

You need to do all you can to make sure your elders are as busy as they want to be all day long, each and every day.

Elders should not be allowed to sit around, doing nothing, all day long if they'd rather be doing something fun and interesting.

Research shows this is a major problem in some nursing homes.

Again, this is for the benefit of your elders: their quality of life, and person-centered care. And... it's required by CMS Guidelines.

For your elders with Alzheimer's here are some suggestions from the NIH.

--Don't expect too much. Simple activities often are best.

--Help the elder get started on an activity.

--Break the activity down into small steps and praise them for each step he or she completes.

--Watch for signs of agitation or frustration with an activity. Gently help or distract the person to something else.

--Incorporate activities the elder seems to enjoy into your daily routine and try to do them at a similar time each day.

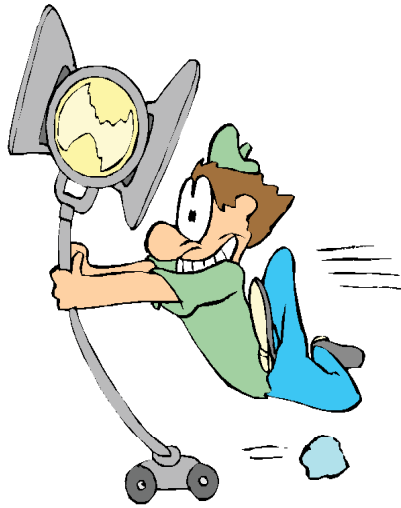
Take your time!

And one last important caregiving note: Take your time!

Much research shows that caregivers tend to fly through personal care activities much, much too quickly.

These times of conversation and socialization are very important to your elders.

It may be the only time they get this opportunity during the day.



Research shows that caregivers tend to fly through personal care activities much too quickly.

Caregivers should use personal care as a time to converse at length with their elders; to get to know them better; and to let them have a good time socializing with you and, during meal-times, with their fellow elders.

Also, this will provide caregivers with great opportunities to learn more about their elders, assess how they're doing, and to be able to report problems early-on, before they become serious.

Always smile and be cheery when doing personal care... always.

A happy attitude is an important part of your caregiving skills, as it benefits your elders in many ways! END



Have a happy, upbeat attitude with your elders at all times! Smile!

Do:

1. smile and be friendly
2. give them choices on how they want to do things
2. let your elder know you genuinely care about him or her
3. Take your time.
4. engage in friendly conversation with your elder while giving care. Listen to responses and follow-up accordingly. You may need to ask yes or no questions depending on the health of your elder.
5. provide privacy and dignity throughout all care
Keep them looking well-groomed and nice
6. never embarrass your elder during any care, no matter what you might find
7. be observant of what is happening with your elder. Any changes in physical or mental condition?
8. Let your elders help as much as possible.
9. Take your time! Enjoy your time with your elders. They enjoy it too!

Don't:

1. tell your elders if you are short-staffed – many will not want to ask for anything because you are so busy.
2. rush them through their care. Plan your time so you can spend some quality time with each elder.
If you act rushed, most elders will keep quiet and not put any demands on your time.
3. tell your elders your personal problems or what you don't like about the facility you are working in.
Your elders have problems of their own.
4. act disgusted if you have to do all of the personal hygiene for your elder.
5. put an elder's shirt on backwards for your convenience.
6. leave your elder exposed during any procedure.
7. sit too far back away from your elder when helping them eat. Sit in front or to the side of the elder – he or she needs to know what you are doing.

Personal Care

Learning goals:

1. To understand why personal care is such an important caregiving skill.
2. To learn specific pointers on how to make personal care extremely valuable to the quality of life and wellbeing of your elders.
3. To learn the basics of personal caregiving.
4. To understand why person-centering is important in personal care activities.

1. **True, False.** Personal caregiving, when conducted properly, is a very important caregiver skill that has substantial benefits for your elders.

2. **True, False.** Usually, in order to stay on schedule, you should proceed through your personal caregiving activities with each of your elders as fast as possible.

3. **True, False.** Regular oral care for each of your elders has an important medical benefit, because research shows that bacteria entering the bloodstream from the mouth can cause serious, even fatal, health problems for your elders.

4. **True, False.** CMS Guidelines state that your elders should be able to choose their preferred type of bath.

5. **True, False.** You do not need to ensure privacy during personal caregiving for those elders with Alzheimer's, because they most likely do not know what's going on.

6. **True, False.** You should always undertake compassionate, friendly conversation with your elders during personal caregiving.

7. **True, False.** You should let all of your elders choose the clothes they want to wear each day, as much as possible, including even those who have Alzheimer's.

8. **True, False.** Giving elders with Alzheimer's just a few choices will help them make decisions without a lot of frustration.

9. **True, False.** Your elders should be able to choose which activities they would like to participate in, based upon their personal preferences, skills, hobbies, and interests.

10. **True, False.** You should have enough activities available to keep your elders as busy as they want to be, all day long.

Name _____ Date _____ Score _____

Answers to Quiz: Personal caregiving

- 1. T
- 2. F
- 3. T
- 4. T
- 5. F
- 6. T
- 7. T
- 8. T
- 9. T
- 10. T