

THE QUEENS
COURIER

MARCH 1-7, 2007

▶ **ASK THE ALZHEIMER'S EXPERT**

Alzheimer's Disease and Bathing

BY JED LEVINE

Q: My mother is in the middle stage of Alzheimer's and is refusing to bathe. What should I do?

A: Bathing is often traumatic for people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Because it is an intimate experience, your mother may perceive it as embarrassing, unpleasant, threatening, or painful and may exhibit disruptive behavior.

Consider these bathing tips:

Find the best time of day and caregiver with whom she feels comfortable. Determine if she prefers baths or showers. If possible, follow her old routines and keep a regular schedule.

Respect her dignity. If she prefers, let her hold a towel in front of herself and wash under it. Let her do as much as possible, assisting as necessary.

Use a gentle tone of voice. Distract her with conversation or make bathing a game with the promise of a reward.

Never leave her unattended or turn away. Be careful helping her in and out of the tub. Let the answering machine pick up any phone calls.

Help her feel in control. Involve her using simple instructions.

Be gentle. Avoid scrubbing and harsh deodorant soaps. Consider a hand-held

shower hose for hard-to-reach areas.

Do not worry about frequency. Use sponge baths between regular bathing.

Test water temperatures in advance. Use only two to three inches of water in the bathtub in case she slips. Avoid slippery bubble baths and oils. Tighten faucets so she cannot manipulate them.

Enhance bathroom safety. Tub benches with backs and adjustable heights, stall guards, grab bars and non-skid adhesives help prevent falls. Secure soap dishes, towel bars and hand rails to hold the weight of her pulling power. Keep floors dry. Consider carpeting in the bathroom. Gather supplies in advance so you can focus on bathing.

Never argue or struggle. If she resists, try later. Never force bathing at risk of injury.

For help with this or any other dementia situation or for a list of our services visit our website www.alznyc.org or call our 24-hour helpline 1-800-272-3900. There is always a caring and informed person at the other end of the line to help you.

*- The Alzheimer's Association,
New York City Chapter*

If you have a question for the Alzheimer's Association, New York City Chapter, please send it to Jed Levine at expert@alznyc.org.