Imagine this: You’ve had a rough day at work. You’re feeling sweaty and tired. You’re looking forward to going home and taking a nice hot relaxing shower.

Now, imagine how it would feel if instead of being able to simply hop in the shower, your physical condition required you to:

- Take your clothes off in front of a stranger.
- Hold onto grab bars because you were afraid of falling in the shower.
- Ask for help washing the private areas of your body.
- Stand and shiver while waiting for someone to bring you a towel.

Suddenly, the idea of a nice hot shower doesn't seem so appealing, does it?

Your clients used to be able to take care of their own bathing needs. Now, many of them need your help. And, they probably aren’t happy about that!

Being dependent on others for bathing probably makes them feel:

- Old and useless.
- Ashamed.
- Scared about what else they might have to give up doing for themselves.

Bathing clients requires patience, strength, compassion and skill. For some clients, it may also require special equipment.

Keep reading to learn ways to make bathing a safer, more efficient process for you and your clients.
The Purposes of Bathing

**Bathing is important because it:**

1. **Cleanses the body by removing dirt and dead skin cells.**
   
   New skin cells continually push older cells toward the surface of the skin. By the time skin cells reach the surface, they are made up of the same lifeless protein as your hair and nails.

2. **Promotes comfort by cooling and refreshing the skin and relaxing the client.**
   
   Most Americans consider bathing to be a source of comfort. Think of all the products that are available to make bathing a pleasant experience: bubble bath, bath oils, shower gels, etc.

3. **Controls body odor by removing bacteria and germs from the skin.**
   
   Body odor is caused by a combination of sweat and bacteria. The main sources of odor are the armpit, the groin and the feet. Some foods—such as garlic, cumin and curry—can cause body odor to linger.

4. **Prevents infection.**
   
   Skin defends the body against injury, infection and harmful substances in the environment. But, the skin must be clean and intact to do its job. That’s where bathing comes in.

5. **Provides an opportunity for clients to move their muscles and joints.**
   
   By encouraging your clients to do as much as possible for themselves during a bath, you help them remain independent—and provide their muscles and joints with a bit of exercise.

6. **Stimulates circulation.**
   
   Blood flow in the body is increased by warm water, rubbing or massaging the skin and by moving joints and muscles during the bathing process.

7. **Helps prevent skin breakdown.**
   
   It’s especially important to clean the skin of incontinent clients. When skin is exposed to urine and/or stool, the risk increases for developing pressure sores and infections.

8. **Gives you an opportunity to communicate with the client and to observe his or her body for changes.**
   
   Bathing is the #1 most time-consuming task for all caregivers. Make the most of this time by checking your client’s body for changes and by making pleasant conversation. (If your client is unable to speak, try singing or humming instead.)
Making Observations at Bath Time

Bath time gives you a terrific opportunity to observe your clients for physical changes. Keep an eye out for problems and report any changes right away.

- Check the hair and scalp for head lice. (Lice can happen to anyone—no matter how young or old, dirty or clean, rich or poor.) Look for white lice eggs (known as “nits”). They look like small bits of dandruff, but do not wash or flake off. Instead, they stick firmly to strands of hair.

- As you comb or wash your client’s hair, observe the scalp for scaling, crusting, irritation, bruises, bleeding, lumps or large areas of missing hair.

- Look over the whole body, making note of any areas of redness, rashes, bed sores, moles or other changes in the skin.

- Check the entire body for puffiness or swelling, broken skin, redness, bruises or bleeding.

- Report any unusual body odors. A strange odor may be a symptom of an illness.

- Watch out for clients who seem to sweat too much, too little or who tend to sweat a lot at night. There are medical conditions that can cause sweating problems. (In fact, it can be life-threatening if a person doesn’t sweat at all.)

- Look for white or yellow areas on finger and toe nails. Your client may have a nail fungus.

- Check for itching, cracked skin between the toes or on the soles of the feet. These are signs of infections such as “athlete’s foot”.

- Watch for black warts on the soles of the feet.

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer. There are one million new cases diagnosed every year. You can watch your clients for signs of skin cancer including:

- Sores that don’t heal.

- A mole that changes size and/or has irregular edges.

- A skin growth that changes color, especially if it turns red, white or blue.

- A mole that becomes tender, itchy or dotted with black spots.

- A skin growth that crusts over, cracks or bleeds.