



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Top Tips for Bathing and Showering

Sensory Processing

Issued by the Paediatric Occupational Therapy Department

Some children and young people may find it difficult to have a bath or shower due differences in their sensory processing. Children may find the sensory experience of being in the bathroom difficult to cope with. This may be due to the noise of running water, the temperature of the water and or the feel of the water on their skin or even the smell from wash products.

Try the following strategies to help manage bath/shower time:

Before bathing / showering

- Consider trying showering or bathing at different times of the day as your child may be calmer in the morning or at night.
- Try to work out what routine works best for your child and maintain a regular time slot.
- Encourage participation in heavy work activities half an hour before getting ready to have a bath or shower. Heavy muscle work activities, such as, pushing and pulling a toy box or laundry basket or doing wall push ups can help children to be calmer.
- Where possible give your child a choice between bathing or showering. Generally showering is often an alerting experience and bathing can be more calming and relaxing especially before bedtime.
- Consider giving a firm body massage before having a bath/shower. Providing firm pressure to the shoulders can be helpful.
- If your child dislikes the noise of running water, run the bath water before the child or young person goes into the bathroom.

- Agree with your child in advance the water temperature, they may prefer a cooler water temperature than you think! Let your child test the water temperature with their fingers.
- Give your child more control in the selection of personal care products if they struggle to deal with certain smells or the feel of hygiene products.
- If showering and the touch of water on the skin is difficult to tolerate consider adjusting the spray type on the shower head.
- Try using social stories to aid understanding of the importance of going in the bath/shower.

During bathing / showering

- Some children can become overwhelmed due to bright lights consider dimming the lights in the bathroom. Smart bulbs could be used to alter the lighting colour and to help create a relaxing environment.
- Consider using ear plugs if your child struggles to tolerate noise levels.
- It is helpful to place a bathmat on the bottom of the bath to help reduce the chances of slipping in the bath. Feeling secure when sitting may help to reduce their overall anxiety level.
- It is not uncommon for children to dislike laying down in bath due to struggling with the change in head position. If this is the case, consider maintaining an upright position and use a handheld shower spray and if possible, encourage them to take control of it. If changes in head position is challenging for your child, they may prefer to shower.

- To help with staying calm in the bath, try using toys that encourage heavy work with the hands such as squeezy and stretchy toys and pouring water from one container to another. Also try wetting a hand towel in the warm bath water and draping this over the shoulders to maintain a constant pressure.
- Some children struggle with having water touch their face when washing their hair. Consider using a bath visor and use a cup or jug to use to pour water over their hair when rinsing.
- Some children will struggle when getting water in their ears, try using ear plugs to reduce chances of getting water in their ears.
- If your child is easily over stimulated, consider reducing clutter around the bathroom.
- If your child struggles to tolerate shampoo and conditioner, consider using a dry shampoo and only use a conditioner when in the bath or shower.
- When washing the hair use a firm touch and count down in time to give a definite end point.
- It can be very distressing to get soapy water into your eyes. Consider using tear free soaps/products. Allow swim goggle or masks in the shower or bath if this helps to make the activity more tolerable.
- Some children can find firm pressure calming. Try applying firm pressure with a face cloth and use slow downward strokes when washing the body.
- Try using visual timers to show how long is left in the bath or shower.

- If your child struggles with the temperature change from getting out of the bath, try placing a towel on a warmed radiator and use it to wrap them up in afterward bathing.
- Some children prefer a soft towel others prefer a heavier towel try maintaining a firm pressure when drying off.

Additional resources

An example of a social story

[A social story for showering](#)

Video strategies for showering and bathing developed by Sheffield's NHS Children's Sensory Processing Service.

[Making Sense: Showering and Bathing](#)

Video strategies for hair washing developed by Sheffield's NHS Children's Sensory Processing Service.

[Making Sense: Hair Washing](#)

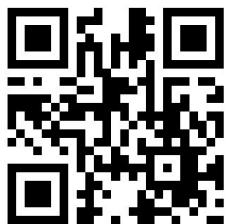
Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS)

You may be able to claim a refund of some travel costs under this scheme. For more information visit the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts/pages/travelcosts.aspx

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Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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