

Top Tips for Bathing and Showering

Sensory Processing

Issued by the Occupational Therapy Sensory Processing Team

Some people may find it difficult to have a bath or shower due to differences in their sensory processing and may find the 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 smells and textures of 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 having a showering in the morning may feel more alerting. A bath in the evening may feel calmer and assist with bedtime routines.
- Try to work out what routine works best 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 work activities, pushing and pulling a toy box or laundry basket or doing wall pushups can help to be calmer. These activities can help calm and regulate the sensory system.
- Where possible, offer 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 trying a firm body massage before having a bath/shower. Providing firm pressure to the shoulders can be calming.

- If noise is difficult, then run the bath water before an individual visits the bathroom or consider using ear defenders when the water is running.
- Agree in advance with the water temperature, some people may prefer a cooler water temperature than you think. Use a temperature gauge to check if the water temperature is appropriate. Once at the desired temperature, encourage checking with their fingers to ensure they are happy to proceed with having a bath.
- Encourage the person to take more control in the selection of personal care products if they struggle to deal with certain smells or the feel of hygiene produces.
- 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.
- Try reducing clutter in and around the bathroom to prevent becoming overstimulated.

During bathing / showering

- Some people can find bright lights overwhelming, try 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.
- Some people dislike lying back in the bath, due to struggling with the changes in their head position. If this is the case, consider maintaining an upright position and use a handheld shower spray and if possible, encourage the individual to take control of it. Showering may be preferred if head position changes are difficult.
- To help with staying calm in the bath, try using toys/sensory tools that encourage heavy work with the hands such as squeeze and stretchy toys. Pouring water from one container to another can also be a calming activity. Try using calming scents, music and water colour changing methods such as bath bombs. Also try wetting a hand towel in the warm bath water and draping this over the shoulders to maintain a constant calming pressure.
- If hair washing is challenging, consider using a bath visor and use a cup or jug to rinse carefully.
- When washing the hair use a firm touch and count down in time to give a definite end point.
- If it is a struggle to tolerate shampoo and conditioner, consider using a dry shampoo and only use a conditioner when in the bath or shower.
- If getting water in the ears is uncomfortable, try using ear plugs to reduce the chances of getting water in the ears.
- It can be distressing to get soapy water into your eyes. Consider using tear-free soaps/products. Try using swimming goggles or masks in the shower or bath if this helps to make the activity more tolerable.

- 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 managing temperature changes it is challenging, for example from getting out of the bath, try placing a towel on a warmed radiator and use it to wrap in straight after bathing.
- Some people prefer soft towels others prefer heavier ones. Try maintaining a firm and consistent pressure when drying off as this can feel calming.

Additional resources

An example of a social story

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

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, easy read, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.



British Sign Language users can use InterpretersLive! a service provided by Sign Solutions. This helps Deaf people to access BSL interpreters, and other communication professionals at any time. More information can be found on our website or by scanning the QR code to the left.

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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PIN 1022/V1

Review date: June 2029

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