



**A CLIENT CARE MODULE:  
BEYOND THE BATHTUB  
(BATHING ALTERNATIVES)**



...Developing top-notch caregivers, one inservice at a time.



*A Client Care Module:*

## **BEYOND THE BATHTUB**

*(Bathing Alternatives)*

We hope you enjoy this inservice, prepared by registered nurses especially for caregivers like you!

## **Instructions for the Learner**

***If you are studying the inservice on your own, please do the following:***

- Read through **all** the material. You may find it useful to have a highlighting marker nearby as you read. Highlight any information that is new to you or that you feel is especially important.
- If you have questions about anything you read, please ask your supervisor.
- Take the quiz. Think about each statement and pick the best answer.
- Check with your supervisor for the right answers. You need **8 correct** to pass!
- Print your name, write in the date, and then sign your name.
- Email In the Know at [feedback@knowingmore.com](mailto:feedback@knowingmore.com) with your comments and/or suggestions for improving this inservice.

**THANK YOU!**

**After finishing this inservice, you will be able to:**

*Recognize and empathize with the most common barriers to bathing.*



*Explain the importance of using a client-centered approach to bathing.*



*Describe at least 6 alternative bathing methods that can be used to overcome common barriers to bathing.*



*Create a list of useful supplies to have on hand prior to bathing clients with common barriers to bathing.*



*Demonstrate client-centered care when bathing clients in your daily work.*



## Inside This Inservice:

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## A Client Care Module: Beyond the Bathtub (Bathing Alternatives)

### ON FRIDAY, MARCIA WAS EXHAUSTED!

Marcia had only worked as a Caregiver for a month, but she was already beginning to dread the daily battles she had with her clients about bathing.

Marcia had orders from her supervisor to bathe her clients twice a week. She had a schedule to keep and she tried her best to design a routine that made it all possible. But every day, there was at least one client on the bath schedule that would derail the whole plan.

- **On Monday**, Mr. Chaney saw her coming with a stack of towels and barricaded himself in a closet.
- **On Tuesday**, Ms. Rose screamed, "Leave. Me. Alone!"
- **On Wednesday**, Mr. Robertson refused to wake up and get out of bed.
- **On Thursday**, Mrs. Hamm grabbed and pinched Marcia all the way to the bathroom. Then she pulled Marcia's hair.
- **On Friday**, Marcia was exhausted. She needed some alternative ideas to help her clients feel better about bath time.

Whether you are a new Caregiver like Marcia or a seasoned pro with years of experience, you probably feel the same uneasy dread and exhaustion as Marcia every time you have to bathe a difficult client.

Professional and family caregivers often report bathing as one of the most challenging areas of long term care, and clients with confusion, dementia, or Alzheimer's disease tend to display a majority of the problem behaviors.

While there's no one right approach, there's enough evidence to suggest that certain bathing practices will work better than others. The secret to success lies in the caregiver's willingness to use a thoughtful, individualized, client-centered approach.

**Keep reading to learn a few new alternative approaches to bathing—and to learn how to create a bathing routine that is client-centered and agreeable to clients and caregivers alike!**



## WHY BATHING IS SO IMPORTANT?

***Bathing does so much more than just clean the body. It's vital to the health and well-being of all living creatures.***

***Here are a few benefits of bathing:***

- **Removes dead skin cells.** Skin cells continually die and get replaced by new cells. We shed a lot of these dead skin cells on our beds, furniture, and clothing. But the rest need to be washed away with good old fashioned soap, water, and friction!
- **Cools, refreshes, and relaxes.** Most people find bathing to be a source of comfort—but not everyone! In this inservice you'll learn how to help clients who are afraid or anxious about bathing.
- **Controls body odor.** Body odor is caused by a combination of sweat and bacteria. Bathing removes these stinky offenders!
- **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.
- **Provides an opportunity for exercise and independence.** 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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Makes inspection possible.** Bathing your client gives you an opportunity to observe his or her body for changes.

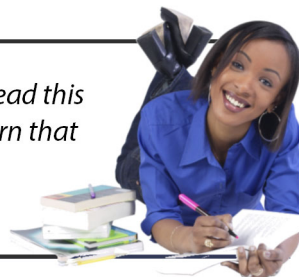


## The Facts

- The old notion of having to shower or bathe clients twice a week to keep healthy is on its way out!
- Bathing frequency should reflect what the client asks for, and if she can't tell you, then it's a discussion that needs to take place with the family.
- Experts agree that an individualized, client-centered approach is the key to a pleasant bathing experience.
- It is not necessary to use gallons of water to get a person clean. Careful washing, with attention to details, is more important than how much water you use.
- Evidence-based research confirms that clients who are towel-bathed (see p. 5) once a week using a mild, no-rinse soap actually have healthier skin than those who shower with regular soap.

## WHAT'S NEW?

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read this inservice, **highlight five things** you learn that you didn't know before. Share this new information with your co-workers!





# PATIENT'S RIGHTS

## CAN THIS BE AN ETHICAL DILEMMA?

When a client acts out in response to being bathed, he is essentially exercising his right to “refuse” the care.

In the case of someone with dementia or Alzheimer’s, the person may have trouble expressing their refusal in a rational way, and may hit, yell, kick, or bite.

Regardless of the way the refusal is expressed, the client still has the right to refuse.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you have the right to force someone to bathe against his/her will?

- What if you believe it’s for their own good?
- What if your supervisor demands it?
- At what point does the patient’s right to refuse end?

## COMMON BARRIERS TO BATHING

*If bathing is so wonderful and healthy, why does it feel like you have to beg, plead, and trick some of your clients into doing it?*

For many clients, bathing may be scary or confusing. For others it may be exhausting or embarrassing.

**Here are a few common reasons your clients may refuse to bathe:**

- **Depression** can cause a loss of interest in personal hygiene.
- **Fatigue** from a physical illness can cause a lack of the energy it takes to keep up with personal hygiene.
- **Hydrophobia** (or fear of water) is common with people who have dementia or Alzheimer’s disease. They may fear water that is too deep, too hot, or too cold. Or, they may feel fearful of water spraying down on them from an overhead shower.
- **Embarrassment** from lack of privacy (especially in facilities) or from having to undress with unfamiliar caregivers.
- **Physical discomfort** from a room that is too cold.
- **Fear of falling**, particularly if the person has fallen in the past.
- **Confusion** can make the steps involved in taking a bath too overwhelming.
- **Disoriented** clients may not bathe because they simply can’t find the bathroom.
- **Forgetfulness** can make the purpose and need for a bath seem unimportant. The person may have bathed on a schedule in the past, but now, days and weeks may go by before he or she remembers to bathe.
- **Humiliation** from having to rely on others for help and/or from having to bathe on someone else’s timetable (or according to the nursing schedule).
- **Poor lighting**, particularly in home bathrooms, can make bathing confusing, frustrating, and dangerous.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THESE BARRIERS?

Your client may have *some* of these barriers to bathing, or he may have **ALL** of them! And the more barriers a person has, the more likely it is that he will be resistant to your suggestions to take a bath!

Keep in mind, your client’s resistance to bathing is not just a problem for you. It’s exhausting for him too! Having to battle you every day for the right to refuse a bath can really take a toll on the client and the caregiver alike.

The good news is that when you understand your client’s barriers, you can easily end the battle by taking steps to offer the alternative approaches to bathing that you’ll find on the next few pages.

## MAKE IT CLIENT-CENTERED

**An important part of your job is to keep your clients clean.** You have a schedule to keep and you have a lot to get done in a short period of time. That means, when it's time for your client to get bathed, you just need him to cooperate and let you do your job.

**But it doesn't always work that way, does it?** Bathing clients on YOUR schedule may seem like a smart way to structure your day, but to the clients, it feels like being bathed against their will.

⇒ This is especially true for clients who are confused, or who have dementia, or Alzheimer's disease.

**There is a solution!** You can eliminate all or most of this disruptive behavior by switching your mindset and providing client-centered care.

**Client Centered Care is care that is organized around the client's preferences, needs, and desires.** Each client enters the healthcare system with his or her own personal history, established routines, and preferences. But traditional health care tends to be oriented more toward staff convenience than client preferences. **Knowing and respecting your client's preferences shifts the focus of care from the staff-centered approach to a more client-centered approach.**

### How You Do It:

- **Make Use of Available Information.** Your workplace may already have a system in place that assesses personal preferences upon admission. If this is the case, it's your responsibility to know how to find this information, read it, and apply it to your care routine with each client.
- **Do Your Own Research.** If your workplace does not gather information about personal preferences, take the time to do it yourself. Be sure to document what you learn and pass the information along to the next shift.



### **Here are some questions you can ask your clients or their family members:**

- What time do you usually wake up in the morning? What's your typical morning routine? Do you like breakfast right away, or do you like to wait until after you shower, had a BM, watched the news, etc.?
- What time do you like to go to bed? What's your usual bedtime routine?
- Do you prefer to shower daily or do you like to just wash up each day and shower a couple of times a week?

**Beyond understanding and honoring your client's personal preferences, client-centered care also focuses on providing physical comfort, emotional support, and finding ways to empower clients and their families.**



## CONNECT IT!

### A CHOICE AND A VOICE

Client Centered Care means you give your clients (and their family members) a **CHOICE** and a **VOICE**.

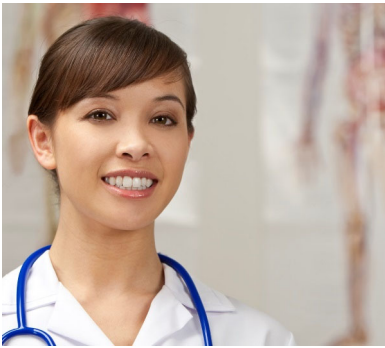
**Do you provide client-centered care when bathing your clients? If so, how?**

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- Do your clients (or their family members) have a choice of what time and how often the client is bathed?
- Does your client have a choice in whether he gets a bed bath or a tub bath?
- What if neither a tub nor a bed bath are acceptable options to your client? Are you open to learning and trying some alternatives?



## THE NEXT STEP!

*Which of your clients might enjoy or benefit from the "Towel Bath" method?*

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- You can present the "Towel Bath" method to your client as a "nice, warm massage" in bed, rather than a "bath."
- Avoiding the words "wash" and "bathe" can be helpful to people with dementia, who may associate the words with a cold, frightening, and uncomfortable experience.

*What bathing-related words trigger anxiety in your client?*

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*Think about ways you can avoid using these words, then test it out!*

## BATHING ALTERNATIVES: TOWEL BATH

A variation on the good ol' fashioned bed bath is a technique called "the towel bath." This technique involves covering the client with a large, warm, moist towel containing a no-rinse soap solution. The client is "washed" by being massaged through the towel. **Here's how you do it:**

### Gather Supplies

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 2 bath blankets            | 2 or more washcloths  |
| 1 large plastic bag        | 1 plastic pitcher filled with <b>warm water</b> and 1-1½ ounces of <b>no-rinse soap</b> |
| 1 large light weight towel |   |
| 1 standard bath towel      |   |

### Perform the Towel Bath

- Place one bath blanket under the person to protect the linen.
- Undress the client, keeping him covered with bed linen or the second bath blanket.
- Place the towels and washcloths in the plastic bag. Pour the soapy water into the plastic bag, and work the solution into the towels and washcloths until they are uniformly damp but not soggy.
- Wring out excess water so that the large towel is not "drippy."
- Twist the plastic bag closed to keep the water and remaining towel and washcloths warm.
- Expose the client's feet and lower legs and immediately cover the area with the large, warm, moist towel. Then slowly uncover the person while unfolding the wet towel to replace the blanket with the towel.
- Start washing by massaging gently through the towel. You can place the bath blanket over the towel to hold in the warmth.
- Wash the backs of the legs by bending the person's knee and going underneath.
- Wash the face, neck, and ears with one of the washcloths, or hand a washcloth to the client and encourage him to wash his own face.
- Turn the person to one side and place the smaller, warm towel from the plastic bag on the back, washing in a similar manner.
- Use a washcloth from the plastic bag to wash the genital and rectal areas.
- No rinsing is necessary with this method.
- When the whole body is washed, remove the wet towel by replacing it with a bath blanket the same way you put the towel on in step #6.

## MORE BATHING ALTERNATIVES

### THE RECLINER BATH

**Who says a bed bath has to be done in a bed?** Charles, an 87 year old man with chronic pain and a terminal illness did not tolerate being moved. When he found a comfortable position in his recliner, he wanted to stay there.

Charles' home health aide, Cindy wanted to bathe him. It had been longer than a week since his last bath, but when she brought it up, he flat-out refused. He said "I'm not getting up from this chair."

So, Cindy compromised. She got Charles' permission to do a "Recliner Bath." She used a basin of water with a no-rinse soap, and padded each body part being washed with an incontinence pad as she went along.

Cindy was able to wash most of Charles' body while he remained comfortably seated in the recliner. She washed his bottom and perineal area the next time he used the commode.

### THE COMMODE BATH

**Clients with dementia or Alzheimer's may develop a fear of water.** This makes it very difficult to get them into a shower or tub.

This was the issue for Martha. Any time a bath or shower was mentioned, Martha would panic. She hit, screamed, and resisted her caregiver's attempts to bathe for two weeks.

One morning, the caregiver arrived and got Martha up to the commode for her routine morning bowel movement. She seemed relaxed and happy. So the caregiver took a chance. She filled a basin with warm water and no-rinse soap and began "massaging" Martha's back with the washcloth.

The caregiver continued to speak in gentle tones, talking about everything except the bath. In no time, she had completely washed and dressed Martha's upper torso.

The caregiver washed Martha's legs while she talked about what they would have for breakfast. Then she had Martha stand while she washed her bottom and perineal area.

**In less than 10 minutes, Martha was washed, dressed, relaxed, and ready for breakfast!**

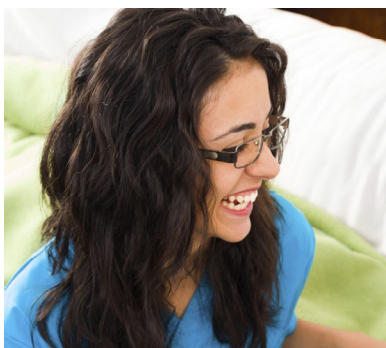


## THINK ABOUT IT!

**Notice, in both the recliner and the commode bath, the caregiver did not wash the hair.** It may be necessary to schedule bathing and hair washing on different days. Doing both at one time may be too much for some clients.

- A visit to the hairdresser or barber, or having one come to the house may be a better alternative.
- Dry shampoos can be a great way to keep hair clean and smelling fresh between showers.
- Encourage clients and family to keep the client's hair cut short if shampooing becomes upsetting or exhausting.
- If the client takes a tub bath, consider using a combination bath gel and shampoo in a pump bottle. Encourage her to wash her own hair.
- Use a cup to rinse hair instead of a handheld shower sprayer if the spraying water is upsetting.





## TIME TO LAUGH!

Three sisters, ages 92, 94, and 96, live in a house together. One night the 96-year-old draws a bath. She puts one foot in and pauses. She yells down the stairs, "Was I getting in or out of the bath?"

The 94-year-old yells back, "I don't know. I'll come up and see." She starts up the stairs and pauses. Then she yells out, "Was I going up the stairs or down?"

The 92-year-old is sitting at the kitchen table having tea and listening to her sisters. She shakes her head and says, "I sure hope I never get that forgetful." She knocks on wood for good measure. She then replies, "I'll come up and help both of you as soon as I see who's at the door."

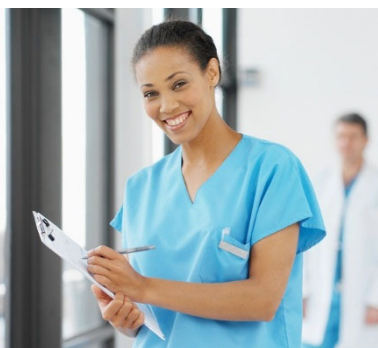
## MAKE BATHING MUSICAL!

Many people respond to music by relaxing, signing along, or even dancing. Music provides *distraction*, but also helps people who are confused or combative to *organize* their thoughts and *understand* the world better.

- **If you sing, or have a client who likes to sing, do it in the bathroom during baths!** The echo created by the hard walls and ceiling can make normal talking sound like jumbled noise for people with dementia or hearing impairments. But singing in that environment sounds great! Everyone sings better in the bathroom!
- **Sing your way through a bed bath.** Mary fought and refused her shower every single time. But, Linda, her nursing assistant, discovered that she liked to sing. Mary's favorite songs were Elvis tunes like "Love Me Tender" and "All Shook Up." Linda learned that when Mary was in a good mood, she could start singing an Elvis song and Mary would join right in. While singing, Linda could do part of the bath while Mary was lying in bed. Soon, Mary would get up to "dance around." Instead of battling her to stay in bed, Linda would keep washing while Mary danced.
- **Give your client an iPod!** Loads of research is going on *right now* that is looking into the benefits of using iPods with personalized playlists for residents in long term care. Listening to preferred music through personal headphones has had a major, positive impact on everyone who uses them. Many residents in the studies have come off their anxiety medications and have decreased combative and depressive behaviors. Of course, this is not a safe alternative for someone in a tub bath or shower, but why not try it during a bed bath?
  - ⇒ **Don't have access to an iPod?** Ask family members to give their loved ones an iPod (or other mp3 player) as a gift or to donate an older model that is no longer being used.
  - ⇒ Be sure to include the client and/or the family members in building the playlist. The wrong choice of music can make the whole technique backfire.
  - ⇒ An iPod Shuffle (or similar device) is the best choice since it has very few buttons, no display screen and is easy to learn how to operate.
  - ⇒ Larger, padded headphones that rest on the sides of the head and ears will be more comfortable than small ear buds that go inside the ears.







## FIVE KEY POINTS!

### REVIEW WHAT YOU LEARNED!

1. Professional and family caregivers often report bathing as one of the most challenging areas of long term care.
2. Bathing clients on YOUR schedule may seem like a smart way to structure your day, but to the clients, it feels like being bathed against their will.
3. Bathing frequency should reflect what the client asks for, and if she can't tell you, then it's a discussion that needs to take place with the family.
4. When a client acts out in response to being bathed, he is essentially exercising his right to "refuse" the care.
5. Experts agree that an individualized, client-centered approach is the key to a pleasant bathing experience.

## A FEW USEFUL PRODUCTS

**GRAB BARS:** Bathroom safety is your number one priority. In the home, talk to your client or the family about having grab bars installed. Grab bars can be tub-mounted or wall-mounted, and there are even low cost, suction cup-mounted versions.

**HEATED TOWEL BAR:** A warm towel after a bath can make all the difference. A heated towel rack can be purchased and easily installed for under \$100. Or you can throw towels in the dryer during the bath and get them out just before drying your client.

**SAFE SEATING:** In the shower, many people find it helpful to have something to sit down on. Shower chairs can be attached to the wall or they can be freestanding stools that can be placed in the shower when needed.

**CLEANSING WIPES:** Comfort Bath® Cleansing Washcloths (pictured to the right) are just one brand of wet wipes designed exclusively for bathing clients without the need for a basin full of water. You can purchase wipes like these at most medical supply stores for under \$5 per package.

**BABY WIPES:** Alcohol free and fragrance free Baby Wipes can be purchased from any grocery store, pharmacy, WalMart, or Target store.

**RINSE FREE SOAP:** An alternative to traditional soap is rinse-free soaps. There are rinse free soaps to use for the whole body. There are rinse free soaps sprays for the perineal area. And there are even rinse free shampoos available. Many rinse free products are available at traditional pharmacies. These products can also be ordered online or from a medical supply store.

**HAIR WASHING PRODUCTS:** A number of specialized hair washing products are available. These include a hair "pool" for bed-based hair washing, rinse trays for in-room hair washing, and no-rinse shower caps.







*A Client Care Module:*  
**Beyond the Bathtub (Bathing Alternatives)**

EMPLOYEE NAME  
(Please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

- ***I understand the information presented in this inservice.***
- ***I have completed this inservice and answered at least eight of the test questions correctly.***

EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE:

\_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Inservice Credit:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Self Study	1 hour
<input type="checkbox"/> Group Study	1 hour

***File completed test in employee's personnel file.***

***Are you "In the Know" about bathing alternatives? Circle the best choice or fill in your answer. Then check your answers with your supervisor!***

- A client-centered approach to bathing means that you:**  
A. Make the client bathe himself.      C. Get family members to bathe the clients.  
B. Give clients a voice and a choice.      D. Bathe every client the same way.
- A benefit of bathing is that it:**  
A. Controls body odor.      C. Increases circulation.  
B. Prevents infection.      D. All of these.
- When you tell your client it's time to go get in the shower, he becomes angry, refuses to go with you, and tells you to "Get out!" You should:**  
A. Insist he go with you right now.  
B. Chart the refusal and move on to your next task.  
C. Try to determine what's bothering him and offer an alternative to the shower.  
D. Get a basin and towels and perform a quick bed bath where he is right now.
- A shy client who is bedbound may benefit from a:**  
A. Commode bath.      C. Towel bath.  
B. New caregiver to bathe her.      D. None of the above.
- True or False**  
Some people with dementia or Alzheimer's may have hydrophobia.
- True or False**  
The only way to get really clean is by taking a long, hot shower.
- True or False**  
Clients lose their right to refuse a bath if they start to smell bad.
- True or False**  
Music can help people who are confused or combative to organize their thoughts and understand the world better.
- True or False**  
All clients should be bathed twice a week for their own good.
- True or False**  
Bathing clients properly requires a large amount of water.

