

# Help with personal appearance

Support for family carers providing personal care for people living with dementia



# Crossing the line

Support for family carers providing personal care for people with dementia

The information provided in this booklet is general guidance and not intended to be used as formal advice. Please see your healthcare professional for more personalised advice.

All information was correct at the time of publication. It is recommended to check what is available in your area.

This booklet is one of a series of booklets developed through the 'Crossing the line' research project.

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**Many people develop daily routines and rituals throughout their lives, that focus on their personal appearance. This may include being clean shaven or wearing a neat and trimmed beard; never leaving the house without makeup; having clean fingernails and enjoying a regular manicure; and making sure glasses are free from smudges.**

Personal appearance stands out to others, and for the person you care for it is an important part of their identity and sense of self. Familiar smells and textures associated with these daily routines, such as perfumes, aftershaves and treasured personal grooming items, can be central to their own memories, and the memories you have of them.

It is therefore important to recognise the person's appearance and help them to maintain this. This may involve supporting them to continue visiting the barber, hairdressers or beauty salon, or providing support at home.

### **Top tips for helping with personal appearance**

- Some people who have dementia may lose interest in their personal appearance or become unable to notice the details of how they look. Also, if a person is low in mood, they may lose interest in how they look.
- Look at photographs together. This is a good reminder of how the person likes to take care of their appearance.
- Is there a particular way they like to trim their beard or a lipstick colour that has been a long-time favourite?

- If the person is agreeable and happy for you to step in and help them to look as you know they liked to look in the past, then that's fine. However, if they are not happy, it's best to respect their wishes in the here and now.

## Facial hair and shaving

- If the person can shave themselves, enable them to do this.
- Help them by finding out if they prefer to have a wet shave, use an electric razor or a beard trimmer.
- This may also include wax, hair removing creams and tweezers to manage whiskers and facial hair.
- Make sure everything they need is at hand and provide simple step by step prompts if needed.
- If more help is needed, an electric razor may be easier to use as long as this is acceptable and tolerated by the person.
- Wet shave razors that are specifically designed for carers to use are also available in pharmacies and online.
- By using alternate strokes on each side of the face, the result will be symmetrical even if the person wants you to stop before the whole face is finished.
- Remember, shaving can be carried out throughout the day with rest periods in between. Or you may both decide to try again the following day.
- If the person you care for has a beard, they may need help washing, combing and oiling it. Find out if they have any favourite products that they like to use.

## Hair washing

Washing hair in the bath or shower is the norm for many people. If this is the case encourage the person to continue doing this. Again use products that are familiar to the person. Some people like to shampoo their hair twice and use a conditioner.

Others will be happy using the same product to wash both body and hair.



- If helping someone in the bath or shower to wash their hair remember to ensure that product does not get into their eyes. Use a flannel to shield their eyes or ask them to tilt their head back during application and rinsing.
- Some people are happier having their hair washed over a sink. Put a towel round the persons shoulders and have another towel for drying. A large jug or a shower head attached to the taps can be used for wetting and rinsing the hair.
- Dry shampoos can be used between washes to keep the hair feeling fresh and looking clean. You can buy these from most supermarkets.
- For a chair bound or bed bound person, there are inflatable hair wash basins or shampoo caps which are used to wash hair without water. These are available at high street stores such as Boots and Superdrug or from specialist disability equipment providers.
- There are some good suggestions on the Assisting Hands website that you could try  
[www.assistinghands-il-wi.com](http://www.assistinghands-il-wi.com)

## Hair-cutting and styling

- Enable the person to be as independent as possible with washing and styling their hair, supporting those personal preferences they have developed over the years.
- Use hair styling tools, products and accessories that are familiar to the person.
- If the person you are caring for can continue to visit the hairdresser or barber for a haircut then support this for as long as possible.
- If it is not possible to visit a hairdresser or barber for a salon haircut, a mobile hairdresser is a good alternative. By visiting the person's home, a familiar and comfortable environment can be created.

## Wig care

If a person has worn a wig or a hairpiece prior to the diagnosis of dementia they will have established a routine for wig and scalp care. Try to learn about this so that you can help if they need assistance in the future.

- The person's scalp and any hair underneath will need to be cared for.
- Ensure that the wig is placed on the head in the right way and that any hair is secured underneath it.
- Wash and clean the wig in accordance with instructions.

## Make-up and facial care

Make-up can be central to some people's identity, whereas to others it is unimportant. Make-up is worn by people of all ages, genders and gender expressions. It is important to work from what is valuable to the individual person.

- Mirrors can be problematic for some people with dementia. Sometimes a small compact mirror is less of a problem as it only shows the part of the face that makeup is being applied to.
- Many people who have used make-up all their lives can apply it even without using a mirror.
- Many people use cleansers and moisturisers as part of their skin care routine. Try to understand the way in which they like this done and products they like to use. By putting some cream on their fingertips they may be able to do this for themselves.
- The person you care for may also be concerned by facial hair on the chin and eyebrows. Try to follow their preferred way of removing these which may include wax, hair removing creams, tweezers or shavers.
- Use beauty products that are familiar to the person you care for or enjoy exploring cosmetic counters together. You may find old make-up in the person's house that will serve as a pointer to the types of brands they prefer.
- A make-up bag can be a source of comfort to many.
- Find make-up items that are easier to hold and apply if handling small items is becoming more difficult. For example, a chunky eyebrow pencil might be easier than a slimline pencil. Lip gloss may be easier for the person to apply themselves than lipstick.
- Allow time for make-up and pamper routines and provide gentle guidance and support if needed.

**This booklet is part of a series about support for family carers providing personal care for people with dementia:**

1. Why does having dementia make personal care difficult?
2. Dealing with complex emotions
3. Common physical issues that impact on personal care
4. Legal and financial issues
5. Changes to the home environment to make personal care easier
6. Strategies that will help make giving personal care easier in the long term
7. Staying strong in the long term
8. Help with continence and using the toilet
9. Help with washing, showering, and bathing
10. Help with teeth and dentures
11. Help with dressing and undressing
12. Help with eating and drinking
13. Help with personal appearance
14. Help with caring for hands and feet
15. Supporting good hearing and vision

**All booklets and the information within them can be found online at: [caringhelp.on.worc.ac.uk](http://caringhelp.on.worc.ac.uk)**

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The illustrations in this booklet were created by  
Rachael Brazell.

