



## Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

Activities of daily living (ADLs) are fundamental skills that are necessary for independent self-care, such as eating, walking, using the toilet, dressing, bathing/showering, and mobility. ADLs are used to indicate an individual's functional status and are used to determine qualifications for medical care, therapy, nursing care, and insurance eligibility. When loved ones need assistance with ADLs, this may require family caregivers to learn how to appropriately support and provide care in a manner that allows their loved one to maintain some independence living at home.

This set of tip sheets will give an overview on bathing/showering, dressing, toileting, and mobility and offer considerations, tips, and tools for assisting with these ADLs.

For additional resources, visit [www.keiro.org/caregiving-resources](http://www.keiro.org/caregiving-resources)



## Bathing/Showering

The ability to bathe and groom oneself. Care recipients may need assistance with bathing/showering if their flexibility, strength, or balance are affected by a condition or ailment.

### Safety Considerations for Assisting with Bathing/Showering

- **Remove trip hazards/clutter** that may be present.
- **Being sensitive to the care recipient's skin** keeping in mind water temperature, hygiene, and skin conditions.
  - Adjust the water temperature to avoid scalding, using mild water pressure.
  - Wash your hands or wear gloves when assisting to avoid the spread of germs.
  - Be gentle with the care recipient's skin by avoiding scrubbing and rubbing and instead gently pat the skin with a soft towel to wash and dry.
    - Be aware of pressure sores that may develop in care recipients who are bed-bound or sitting for long periods, swelling, bruising, rashes, dry skin, or other unusual conditions.
- **Consider home modifications** if needed, for safer and easier bathing/showering:
  - Grab bars or rails near the toilet, shower, and/or bathtub
  - Temperature control valve for tub and shower
  - Walk-in showers/tubs or curbless showers
  - Adjustable shower head or hose
- **Consider products** if needed, for safer and easier bathing/showering:
  - Shower bench
  - Washbasin
  - Non-slip shower/bath mats
  - No rinse bathing wipes
  - Dry shampoo
  - Dermatologist-recommended moisturizing lotions for dry and sensitive skin



## Dressing

The ability to select appropriate clothes and put the clothes on. Care recipients may need assistance with dressing if they have challenges with dexterity, flexibility, coordination, or strength.

### Honoring Your Care Recipient's Independence while Dressing

- **Giving extra time to dress** – Plan for extra time to assist the care recipient with dressing. Laying out clothes and putting the clothes in an order can streamline the process. Communicating what you are doing while assisting with dressing and in general can help make dressing more efficient.
- **Provide choices** – Having a sense of choice allows care recipients to feel they can still keep their autonomy. If the situation requires the care recipient to choose clothing from a limited set of choices, it may be helpful to know preferred styles (color, shape, pattern) so that even if the choices are limited, they will choose something from the given options. If having too many choices confuses the recipient, simplify choices for wardrobe by having duplicates of existing clothing that your care recipient likes.
- **Try adaptive clothing** – Adaptive Clothing is specifically designed for individuals with physical disabilities, mobility issues, cognitive challenges, and sensory sensitivities while still looking like normal clothing. Adaptive clothing can make dressing easier, more efficient to use, and can be more convenient by saving time. Examples include:
  - Velcro, magnetic buttons, side zippers, or seamless items to reduce pressure on the body .
  - Snap-on buttons, slip-on shoes, or belts that can be put on with one hand.
  - Wide-width shoes and socks.
  - Dignity or antistrip suits, which are primarily used for those with Alzheimer's dementia to prevent inappropriate undressing, can allow for comfortable catheter access, and are good for hospital visits.



## Toileting

The ability to get to and from the toilet, use it appropriately, and clean oneself. Care recipients may have difficulty toileting if they have mobility challenges or incontinence issues. Incontinence is the loss of bladder control, which may be a factor when providing care for a loved one.

### Considerations to Make Toileting Easier

- **Use a consistent frequency/routine** – Since your care recipient may not tell you when they need to use the toilet, ensure that they use the toilet regularly by asking if they need to use the restroom or offering verbal reminders every 1.5 to 2 hours and experiment to find the timing that works best.
- **Reduce risks to ensure a safe environment** – Consider home modifications, if needed, for safer and easier toileting:
  - Falls
    - Grab rails in the toilet area
    - Toilet paper roll holder with grab bar or safety support
    - Raised toilet seat with safety frame
    - Transfer bench
  - Vision
    - Toilet bowl with LED nightlight
    - Lighting and motion detection lights for nighttime use
- **Consider products to assist with the following:**
  - Toileting
    - Commode (simplified toilet with supports) and bedside commode
    - Bedpan or urinal
  - To help maintain independence
    - Sink knobs that are easier to hold, with extended length levers, tap turners
    - Seat raiser on the toilet to help sit down and get up from the toilet
  - **Be prepared for accidents** – Having an incontinence care kit in the form of a packed bag with the products above, a change of clothes, and clean up essentials prepared can be helpful. Additional supplies for accidents can include Incontinence briefs and incontinence pads (disposable or washable) or a plastic bed or mattress cover.

## Mobility

Mobility includes the concepts of ambulating and transferring. Ambulating/walking is the ability to move from one place to another. Transferring is the ability to move from one position to another including the ability to get in and out of bed or getting in and out of a chair.

## Tools for those who can ambulate independently with assistive devices

- Canes provide balance and support taking the pressure off one or both legs and can have different handles for varying grip preferences or to help for those with arthritis.
  - Single-point canes are the most common type of cane, with a single point that touches the ground for care recipients with slight balance issues.
  - Quad canes are heavier and more stable with four feet at their base; they are recommended for care recipients with greater balance/stability issues, are freestanding, and help to reduce slippage.
  - Forearm canes offer support to the care recipient's forearms with an extension that takes the weight off hands and wrists, transferring to the upper arms.
  - Portable and folding canes are easier to transport.
- Walkers have a larger base of support and are for those who can ambulate but need more support/stability in both legs. They typically have a metal frame with attached legs and a varying number of wheels.
  - Standard walker often called the pick-up walker has the most stability.
  - Knee walker has a knee platform and helps if the care recipient has an injury on the foot or ankle.
  - Rolling walkers, also known as rollators, typically include wheels on all legs depending on the model allow the user to push it forward without lifting allowing for endurance and can have features such as seats, backrests, and cupholders.

## Tools for those with limited mobility requiring caregiver assistance

- Gait belts in addition to a walker or a cane can offer an additional level of support and stability.
- Manual wheelchairs may become necessary for those who can no longer walk safely and may need assistance and require arm strength and skill from the user or another person pushing them to move the chair.