

## BATH TIME: SIMPLE TIPS FOR SAFETY AND COMFORT

Living with ALS can turn everyday tasks which used to require little thought or energy to become a challenge. Simple hygienic bathroom activities such as washing up, combing your hair, brushing your teeth and similar activities, often require some added support for safety and comfort.

In the early stages of ALS preserving independency is very important to most people, especially when it comes to washing themselves, getting dressed and going to the toilet. If you're always one step ahead of the changing needs that are typical for the different stages of ALS, it can prolong the independency of the patient and allow the caregivers to easily offer the right resources if necessary.

### Creating an ALS accessible bathroom

Consider, for example, to make the bathroom more accessible by placing handles next to the toilet and inside the shower cabin to ensure added balance and support. A quilted shower chair with antiskid rubbers on the legs can decrease the risk of falling while independency remains. It even requires less energy from the patient (sitting down versus standing up). Installing a showerhead you can hold will contribute to the comfort of a sit down shower. You can also consider installing a roll-in shower in the bathroom so the shower remains user friendly as the disease progresses.

In a bathroom you can slip easily. Limiting moist around the bath tub or shower can help prevent falling down. In case your bathroom doesn't have an exhaust, it's advised to install one. Put an antiskid mat in the bath tub or shower cabin. Make sure you have an antiskid floor carpet or self-adhesive antiskid strips on important surfaces around the sink and other often used routes.

Flatten all hard and sharp edges and corners to prevent injuries if someone does fall down. Specialist assistive technology of the ALS Association Alisa Brownlee also offers this English guide to avoid falling down at home.

As ALS progresses, the bathroom techniques will change and the caregiver will probably need to help out more. When the muscles weaken, it becomes increasingly more exhausting for ALS patients to wash themselves. It's ill-advised to bathe in warm water for too long seeing as this can stimulate muscle fatigue.



### Buy the right resources

A shower chair on wheels, which gives more support than an ordinary bath bench, can be a great help. In a rolling chair you can move to the most comfortable spot and avoid difficult maneuvers in the small bathroom space. You can also consider making use of disposable wash cloths or a bed bath if relocating to the shower becomes too difficult.

There are a lot of tools available to help ALS patients during their daily tasks. If you're having trouble during a certain activity, most of the time a tool has been invented to help you! Some of the most used tools to help you with personal hygiene are:

- An elevated toilet seat – an elevated seat makes sitting down and standing up again easier and if you can find one with armrests, the movement will become even easier.
- A toilet with accompanying bidet – this ensures more independency when the patient goes to the toilet and furthermore it comes in handy for the caregiver in case he/she has to help out more.
- A bath sponge with a long handle – makes it easier to wash the feet and back.
- A shower bench or chair with a showerhead you can hold – makes it easier and requires less energy from the patient.
- An electric toothbrush and razor – come in handy when the muscle strength in the hands decreases and also makes it easier for the caregiver when he/she needs to help.

Translation: **Sara De Roy**