

# Bathing and Showering

Bathing and showering after spinal cord injury often requires special devices. The bathroom might need to be modified to fit a wheelchair and other equipment. Being safe while bathing helps prevent injury. Bathrooms can be dangerous because there are many hard and slippery surfaces. When you have poor feeling, water temperature setting may need to be adjusted to prevent burns. Having the right set up helps you stay safe and prevent injuries.

### Special Equipment

Some equipment can make bathing and showering much easier. After spinal cord injury, most people will need a handheld shower head and bath bench. Handheld shower heads can be modified for people with reduced hand function. Other helpful devices include:

- Bath bench with commode cut out
- Long handled sponge
- Pump containers for soap
- Wash mitten
- Rolling shower commode
- Soap on a rope
- Wall mounted soap dispensers

### Bathroom Modifications

There are many things you can do to modify your bathroom to make it more accessible. For more on this, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Bathroom Making Your Bathroom Easy to Use](#) handout. Possible changes to your bathroom include:

- Grab bars
- Pedestal sink
- Lever faucets
- Wide doors hinges
- Roll-in shower

While bathing, hard surfaces and wet skin can put you at risk of pressure sores. For more about this, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Pressure Sore Prevention](#) handout.

**Contact your Occupational Therapist for more information.**

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SCE2-Sd4-2015-12-09

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### Bathing Safely

Taking safety precautions will help make sure you and your assistant stay safe in the bathroom. Here are things you need to watch out for:

- Scalding hot water can burn you without knowing.
- Hard and wet surfaces can cause pressure sores.
- Slippery floors can cause falls.

**Preventing burns:** When you have poor feeling in your body, you are at risk of burning yourself with hot water without knowing. Certain things can be done to prevent this:

- Have your hot water heater set to 49°C (120° Fahrenheit).
- If possible have scald guards placed on your faucets.
- When in the shower, avoid putting your feet under a dripping faucet.

**Have towels handy:** Keep towels near the shower in a place where you can reach them easily. Keep a towel on your wheelchair cushion after transferring to your commode. This will keep your cushion dry when you transfer back to your wheelchair. Dry yourself quickly after bathing. Wet skin is more sensitive and at higher risk of developing pressure sores.

**Non-slip surfaces:** Wet bathtubs and bathroom floors can be slippery and dangerous. Use non-slip surfaces or bath mats inside and outside the shower or tub.

**Padded shower bench:** Being wet on a hard surface can put you at risk of developing a pressure sore. Use a padded shower bench to help protect sensitive skin.

**Keeping water off the floor:** Roll up towels and place them at the bottom of the tub or shower. This helps soak up water that splashes on the floor when sitting on a bath bench. Some bath benches come apart and allow you to close the shower curtain. Others don't let you close the curtain. To prevent splashing, you can tuck the shower curtain under your bum. Another option is to cut the shower curtain a little to let it pass on either side of the bench.

Your therapist can help you find equipment for your bathing and showering needs.

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### Bathing Tips

#### Full Hand Function

Most people with full hand function can wash themselves alone. Using a long handled sponge can help you clean hard to reach areas. Here are some other tips:

- Cross your feet at the ankles so you can clean the bottom of your feet.
- When sitting on a bath bench, lean to the side to help clean your bum and groin. Grab bars can help you be more stable when leaning.
- Washing your bum on a raised toilet seat is sometimes easier.

#### Reduced Hand Function (Level of injury C7-T1)

People with some hand weakness can sometimes bathe alone with special devices. Depending on your sitting balance and arm strength, a bath bench might be right for you. Some people will need a roll-in shower. Adding non slip grips to a hand held shower head and soap containers can help.

#### Low or No Hand Function (Level of injury C1-C6)

People with no hand function often need assistance for bathing. This usually requires a rolling shower commode and a roll in shower. Commodes with a tilting feature can help keep your blood pressure under control while bathing. Depending on your arm strength, you might be able to wash parts of your body on your own. For this you might need special devices. Helpful devices include:

- Wall mounted soap
- Lever faucets
- Adapted handle for a handheld shower head
- Wash mitten

For more about level of injury, check out the Spinal Cord Essentials [Spinal Cord Injury](#) handout.

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