

Personal care and hygiene

Except for your loving presence, there is probably no better way to make your child feel cared for, than to keep her clean and fresh smelling. Being clean gives a sense of wellbeing. It also helps prevent infection and skin problems. You may find as time goes on that you need help with this care. It may be good to see if there is another family member whom you can involve sometimes. This means your child will be used to someone else being there and doing some of the care of the body.

Bathing

A bath will refresh your child. Give him a bath/shower or help him bathe everyday. Your health care professional can get you bath/shower chairs and lifting equipment if you need it.

If your child can't get into a tub/shower:

*** Give a bath in bed:**

- ◆ Bring warm water and soap to the bedside with a washcloth and several towels.
- ◆ Place a towel under the part of the body you are washing so the bedding stays dry.
- ◆ Wash one part at a time. Cover other parts of the body with a light blanket to prevent chilling.
- ◆ If your child is not up to a full bed bath try to wash his face, hands, underarms, and genitals.

*** Wash hair in bed:**

- ◆ Shift your child's head so that it hangs slightly over the edge of the bed. Put one side of an open plastic garbage bag under your child's head. Cut a hole at the other end of the bag. Place the end with the hole into a bucket on the floor.
- ◆ You might need someone to help, lots of towels, shampoo and pitchers of warm water close at hand.
- ◆ Pour the water over the child's head and into the garbage bag. The water should run through the bag and into the bucket.

Issues of privacy are important even to young children. They are very important to school-aged children and youth. We encourage you to keep this in mind as you plan for these daily routines.

If your child has any pain, movement during a bath may be uncomfortable. Giving pain medication ahead of time will make it easier for both of you.

Use only small amounts of mild soap/shampoo. It is hard to rinse thoroughly.

Mouth care

Encourage your child to brush her teeth at least twice a day for as long as possible. If she has trouble brushing, rinsing or spitting, you should do mouth care two to four times a day.

- * Raise the head of the bed to prevent choking.
- * Moisten and clean the tongue, lips and the inside of the mouth with a soft toothbrush. You can brush very gently.

OR

- * Clean and wet the mouth with a sponge toothette, or gauze on the end of a tongue depressor (popsicle stick) dipped in water or half strength mouthwash.

Tips:

- ◆ Apply petroleum jelly, lanolin, or lip balm to the lips throughout the day.
- ◆ If your child is able to swallow, give him small sips of fluid often.
- ◆ Use a dropper, moist swab, or spray bottle to keep the mouth wet through the day.

Talk to your health care professional if:

- * Mouth is sore or swollen.
- * Mouth has sores.

Skin care

Your child's skin needs special care because:

- * she will spend more time sitting, or in bed.
- * he may eat and drink less, so the skin will be less supple and healthy.
- * the illness/condition may cause skin problems like itchiness.

Problem areas: Bony parts such as hips, lower back, heels, elbows and behind the ears may need special attention.

* **Change your child's position often**

- ◆ *Give enough pain medication so your child will be able to move (or be moved) comfortably.*
- ◆ Use pillows to prop the body into changed but comfortable positions.

Keeping your child's mouth moist will help relieve thirst when she is not eating/drinking.

* **Keep the bed/chair as comfortable as you can**

- ◆ Keep the bed linens clean and wrinkle free.
- ◆ Use a foam (sometimes called an egg crate mattress) or water based or air mattress.
- ◆ Use sheepskins, heel protectors, and elbow protectors as needed. Ask your nurse whether a special mattress is available from any of the programs.

* **Keep the skin clean and dry**

- ◆ Don't use soap unless really necessary and then select a mild soap for bathing such as Ivory®, Neutrogena®, baby soap, Dove® or Alpha Keri®.
- ◆ Rinse all soap from the skin.
- ◆ Gently pat dry with a soft towel.

* **Apply lotion several times a day to bony areas or dry/flaking skin**

Good choices are: Cream/lotion containing Vitamin A & D or E, baby oil/cream/lotion, Aquaphor lotion®, Aloe vera® gel, Sween® cream/pericare cream, Hollister® skin conditioning cream.

* **Soothe itchiness**

- ◆ Bathe with cool water.
- ◆ Use oatmeal soap or one with oil.
- ◆ Add baking soda or small amount Alpha Keri® oil to bath water
- ◆ Put cool (not icy) damp, soft cloth over itchy areas.

If you can't control the itch, talk to your health care professional. There are creams, sprays, or medications to reduce the itch.

* **Take care of skin breakdowns early**

Watch for signs that the skin is breaking down

- ◆ redness;
- ◆ dryness, flaking, peeling;
- ◆ bleeding, blisters or openings in the skin;
 - itching
 - pain.

If you see a cut or sore or oozing area do not massage or use any lotion. Contact your health care professional to find out how to dress the wound.

Keep nails short and clean so scratching doesn't damage the skin.

This pamphlet is the result of a collaboration between

British Columbia's Children's Hospital
and Canuck Place Children's Hospice

Information about ordering copies:
online: www.cw.bc.ca/library/bookstore

email: famreslib@cw.bc.ca

Phone: 1-800-331-1533

© February, 2004

BCCH-1007



An Agency of the Provincial
Health Services Authority



CANUCK PLACE
CHILDREN'S HOSPICE