

Personal Care

Bathing, grooming and using the toilet are everyday tasks that may become more complicated with Parkinson's. The bathroom can also be one of the highest-risk areas in the home for slips and falls. Some people may also notice bladder or bowel changes that affect personal care.

This chapter shares practical tips and tools to help make personal care safer and easier to manage.

Personal care self-check

The list below highlights challenges that may develop or become more noticeable as Parkinson's symptoms change over time. Use it to help identify strategies in this chapter and guide conversations with your care team.



Check off any that apply to you:



Falls or concerns about falling in the bathroom



Trouble using grooming tools (razor, toothbrush, hairbrush)



Skipping or forgetting grooming or hygiene tasks



Difficulty reaching all areas for washing or grooming



Feeling unsteady getting into or out of the shower or tub



Not feeling fully clean after bathing



Difficulty sitting down or standing up from the toilet



Bladder or bowel changes (urgency, leaks or constipation)



Difficulty cleaning after using the toilet

What other challenges have you noticed?

Top Safety Tips in the Bathroom

Use these tips as a guide and adjust based on your needs.



Choose stable supports

Grab bars, shower chairs and raised toilet seats help prevent falls when standing or sitting



Keep floors dry and use non-slip mats

Reduces the risk of slips and falls



Sit when you need to

Brushing teeth, washing or shaving can be safer seated if you're feeling unsteady on your feet



Add nightlights or motion lights

Helps you navigate safely in the dark if you need to get up to use the bathroom



Keep toiletries and towels within easy reach

Avoids overreaching or twisting, which can cause falls



Have a way to call for help

Leave the door slightly open, bring a phone with voice commands or use an alert system

Care Partner Tip

Bathroom routines may take more time. A slower pace can help reduce the risk of slips, falls and frustration.

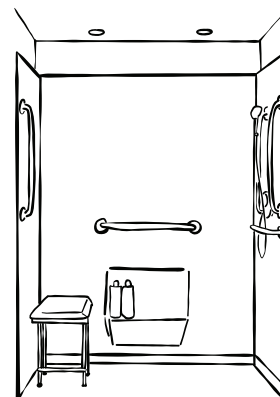
Personal Care Tips

Grooming

- Break tasks into steps (wash your face, rest, brush teeth or shave).
- Use reminders such as checklists or large notes.
- Sip water, chew sugar-free gum or use mouthwash or oral swabs for dry mouth.

Bathing

- Use an easy-entry shower if available. Walk-in or no-lip showers reduce fall risk.
- Use warm water. Water hotter than 120°F can irritate skin and affect blood pressure.
- Dry skin completely after bathing to help prevent irritation or sores.



Care Partner Tip

If you're helping with bathing, a sponge bath may be easier on days when a full shower or bath is tiring. Expose only the area being washed to help maintain warmth and privacy.



Using the Toilet

Sit and stand with care

- Move back until your legs touch the toilet before sitting.
- Stand slowly. If you feel dizzy or unsteady, sit back down.
- Use a raised toilet seat or grab bars if needed to make sitting and standing easier.

Manage urgency and constipation

- Clothing that is easy to remove may help when bathroom trips feel urgent.
- Plan ahead for bathroom needs. Use the toilet before leaving home or at regular times if helpful and know where bathrooms are when you are out.
- Drink fluids, eat fiber-rich foods such as oatmeal, ripe pears or cooked vegetables and stay active to help keep bowel movements regular.
- Talk to your care team if urgency or constipation is ongoing or difficult to manage. Treatments may include diet changes, medications or pelvic floor therapy.

Plan for nighttime bathroom use

- Keep a clear, well-lit path to the bathroom, especially at night.
- Consider a urinal or bedside commode to reduce nighttime trips and fall risk.

Care Partner Tip

Bathroom care can feel uncomfortable for both of you. Talk ahead of time about what help feels acceptable and when outside support may be needed.

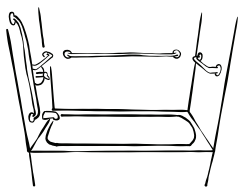
Bathroom Tools

An occupational therapist can recommend bathroom tools and equipment based on your daily routines and show how to use them safely.

Supports

Grab Bars

Install securely near the shower, tub and toilet for support



Shower chair or tub transfer bench

Provides seated support and may reduce slips and fatigue



Raised toilet seat or commode frame

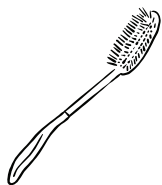
Makes sitting and standing easier



Grip and Reach

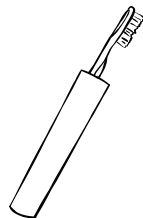
Long-handled brushes, combs or back scrubbers

Help reduce bending and support balance



Foam tubing on toothbrushes, razors or brushes

Makes items easier to hold



Electric toothbrushes, flossers or shavers

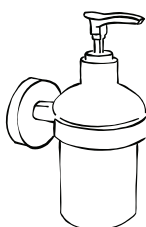
May be easier to grip and use



Hygiene

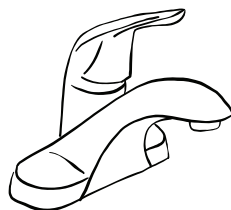
Liquid soap pumps

Easier to use with wet hands



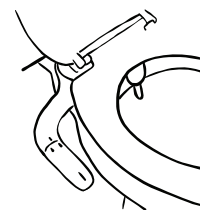
Lever-handled or motion-sensor faucets

Take less effort to turn on and off



Bidets or disposable wipes

Provide gentler cleaning



Managing Bladder Leaks

As Parkinson's progresses, bladder issues such as urgency or leaks may become more common. This is because Parkinson's affects the muscles and nerves that control the bladder. These issues can be challenging, but there are ways to manage them.

Talk with your doctor

Ask about treatment options or a referral to a pelvic floor specialist, urologist or urogynecologist.

Use absorbent products if needed

Pads or disposable underwear can help manage leaks and boost confidence. Disposable underwear may be especially helpful when away from home.

Protect furniture or bedding

Underpads can reduce worry and make cleanup easier.

Reduce nighttime bathroom trips

Limit drinks in the evening if recommended and consider a urinal, bedpan or bedside commode. Some drinks, like caffeine or alcohol, may increase nighttime urination.

Some people drink less water because they worry about leaking or falling when getting up at night. It's important to stay hydrated — usually about 6–8 glasses a day, unless your doctor recommends otherwise.

Find support for incontinence from the National Association for Continence at [Nafc.org](https://www.nafc.org).

Helpful Resources

Learn more about bladder issues, incontinence and [at Parkinson.org/NonMovement](https://www.parkinson.org/NonMovement).

Watch CareMAP video on personal care for practical tools and tips designed for care partners at [Parkinson.org/CareMAP](https://www.parkinson.org/CareMAP).