

How to Give a Bed Bath: Step-by-Step Guide

Bed baths are one of the most fundamental skills you can learn as a nurse or caregiver. As the name implies, bed baths are for patients who can't get out of bed to wash themselves. Many types of nurses, from an RN in a hospital to a home healthcare aide, give bed baths to patients of all kinds—such as a child recovering from surgery or an elderly person with dementia who doesn't remember how to bathe.



Below, we explain what supplies you'll need and how to give a bed bath in five steps, as well as preparation and follow-up care.

Why are bed baths important?

Giving a bed bath may not be the most glamorous of nursing skills, but it's absolutely essential to keeping a patient happy and healthy. Bed baths

help keep patients clean and dry, which in turn keeps their skin healthy and reduces their chances of developing rashes and other skin irritations. It also keeps surgery sites clean and helps reduce the risk of infection. Finally, it helps your patient or loved one feel fresh, clean and more dignified, which can have immense psychological benefits in addition to the physical ones.

Bed Bath Supplies

For most caregiving tasks, you'll reach for your nursing supplies, but for this one, you'll actually set aside your home health nursing bag. Instead, you'll need:

- Several soft washcloths
- Several towels
- A basin of soapy water
- A basin of clean water
- Baby soap or another gentle, non-irritating cleanser
- Lotion, deodorant and other personal care products
- Waterproof covering for the bed
- A table to hold everything
- A lightweight blanket

Bed Bath Preparation

Before you can actually start the bed bath, there are several steps that you need to take to prepare the patient and the room:

1. Close the window, turn up the heat and otherwise keep the room at a comfortable temperature for the patient.
2. Fill the basins with warm water and arrange them on the table or stand. The water temperature should not be hotter than 115° F (46° C) to avoid scalding the patient. If you don't have a thermometer, you can test the water with your elbow. It should feel warm but not too hot.
3. Place towels or a waterproof covering on the bed to keep it dry during the bed wash.
4. Cover the patient with a large towel or blanket and help them undress. You should keep them covered with the blanket to keep them warm and help them feel more dignified.

How to Give a Bed Bath in 5 Steps

Now, you're ready to give the bed bath itself. Here's how to give a bed bath:

1. Wet the washcloth, but don't get it soapy yet. Wipe one eyelid from the inner corner to the outer corner and then pat dry. Repeat on the other eye.
2. Now, wet the washcloth with soapy water. Wash and dry your patient's face, neck and ears. Make sure not to lather the soap too much or you'll risk getting suds in their eyes or mouth (this is one of the reasons many people use baby shampoo for bed baths).
3. Once you're done washing above the neck, it's time to wash one side of the body at a time. Start with the shoulder, upper body, arm and hand. Then, move down to the hip, legs and feet. Pull the blanket or towel back as you wash an area and then replace it after you've dried them off. Look for rashes, redness, sores and other skin irritations as you wash them.
4. Change the bath water before washing the genital area, which is always the last area to be washed.

5. Clean the genital area. For women, be sure to move front to back, and for men, be sure to wash under the testicles. You may need to bend the person's knees to reach the area, or help them roll onto their side so you can clean properly between the buttocks.

Bed Bath Follow-up Care

After you're done officially giving the bed bath, clean your hands. Then, moisturize any dry spots on the patient's skin, such as the feet, with lotion and let it absorb. Remove any wet towels or bed coverings and help your patient get dressed again. Dispose of the dirty water, clean the basins and put the used towels and washcloths in the laundry to be cleaned.

You may feel a bit embarrassed when you give your first bed bath, but it's a very easy process to master. Follow these steps and you'll soon know how to give a bed bath like a pro.