

Bathing and ALS

As bathing becomes more challenging, there are a number of strategies and devices that can help you get clean while staying safe, conserving energy, and remaining more independent.

Bath and Shower Safety

In the bathroom, safety should be your top priority. If you are having doubts about the safety of your current bathing routine, reach out to your physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) for suggestions. If they have not seen your tub/shower setup, you can describe it to them or even send photos or videos.



A home safety evaluation by a professional from a home health agency can assess the safety and accessibility of your home (including your bathroom), and make recommendations such as using assistive devices or placing non-slip mats in your tub or shower. This evaluation should be covered by insurance.

Bathing Independently

There are a number of devices that can help you continue to bath independently. For example, installing grab bars in and near your tub or shower can help with balance.

Standing while taking a shower uses more energy than you may realize. Sitting down in a shower chair while getting clean can help you prevent falls and save energy for other activities. While sitting, you can use a hand-held showerhead to direct the flow of water and use devices like long-handled sponges, luffa sponges, or bath mitts. Wall-mounted pumps may make it easier to dispense soap and shampoo.

If you are concerned about safely stepping over the tub or lip of the shower, you can use a tub transfer bench or tub slider to slide into the tub and then remain seated on it while bathing.

Bathing with Assistance

If you no longer feel safe bathing on your own, or if you find the process too exhausting, it is probably time to ask for assistance from a caregiver, whether a family member, friend, or professional. If you need assistance getting over the tub and showering, your caregiver can either use a tub transfer bench or tub slider with a swivel seat to help bathe you safely.

If your mobility is limited, you may need to be transferred to a rolling shower commode chair and then wheeled into a barrier-free shower. If you feel you need more trunk and neck support than a standard rolling shower chair can provide, a tilt-in-space shower chair with an adjustable headrest will provide greater support.

Bathing Outside of the Bathroom

If getting to the tub or shower is not possible, there are other ways to get bathed and stay clean. Options include using a wheelchair-accessible portable shower stall outside of your bathroom or setting up an inflatable bathtub on your bed. You can get your hair washed either in bed with a shampoo basin or while in your wheelchair by attaching a hair washing tray to the sink.

If you need to get bathed in bed, an occupational therapist or nurse can visit to train your caregiver on proper positioning and techniques for giving a sponge bath or using body wipes.

Bathing devices are not usually covered by insurance. However, you can ask your ALS clinic or local ALS Network care manager if they have any that you can borrow. You can also visit the ALS Equipment Guide to learn more and purchase devices directly.

Do you need to renovate your bathroom?

Before rushing to renovate your bathroom (and spending a lot of money), discuss options with your OT and PT. There are assistive devices that might work well with your current bathroom configuration. For example, if you are unable to step over the tub, you may be best off keeping your tub and using a tub slider. If you need a rolling shower commode chair, you may need to replace your bathtub with a barrier-free shower. If you have a stall shower with a lip, you may be able to replace it with a flexible barrier that can be rolled over.

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