

Bathing

Bathing a child with cerebral palsy (CP), encouraging the child to cooperate, and perhaps eventually bathing independently often presents problems for caregivers, especially when the child is older or more severely involved. In this case, the difficulties faced in bathing the child arise as a result of the inability to sit.

Bathing a young child with CP is usually relatively easy as long as the base of the child's bath has a non-slip surface for safety. If the surface is slippery, a small towel placed under the child is usually adequate or, if you prefer, a small bath mat that sticks to the bottom of the bathtub. The care and attention given to preparing yourself and the child before putting the child in or out of the bath is important.

Never leave the child unattended or alone in the bath or in a bathing aid.

Some children are difficult to handle when lifting in and out of the bath. Some may throw their hands and arms backwards into extension. Others may have poor head control and low truncal tone and tend to slip through one's hands.

Rather than lifting a child in and out of the bath in a semi lying position, it may be easier to hold the child if you flex the child first so that the hips are bent and the trunk and arms brought well forward (**Image 1**). If it is difficult to flex a child in the early months, as a short-term solution you might try washing as shown in (**Image 2**).



Image 1



Image 2

As the child grows bigger you might like to try washing (**Images 3 and 4**).



Image 3



Image 4

Another possibility is to bath the child in the base or tray of your shower if it has a non-slip floor. The problem with this is that it involves lowering the child to floor level and raising the child from floor level (**Image 5**).

For a child with poor head control and predominantly low tone it may be helpful to try out some of the versatile and easy-to-use swimming pool aids (**Image 6**).



Image 5



Image 6

Children with Cerebral Palsy

Some children push their head back especially when washing their face.

This can sometimes be avoided by bringing the child's two arms forward and wrapping a towel tightly around the shoulders and chest (**Image 7**).

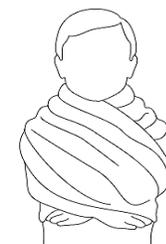


Image 7

If the child is able to bath independently, help can be given by two non-slip mats, one placed inside the bathtub and the other outside, a box or stool at the right height on which the child can sit before entering or getting out of the bath.

(**Image 8**).

If possible, have a support for the child to hold on to: grab bars are useful for this purpose. Make sure the bath only contains a few inches of water and check the water temperature.

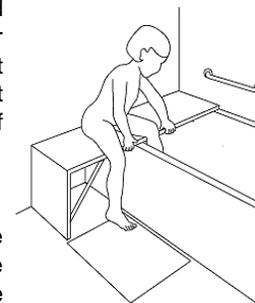


Image 8

Preventive back care for caregivers

One of the problems that often arise when bathing an older child is that it can put a strain on the caregiver's back, which can cause problems in later life. So, also think about the best position in which to place yourself. Kneeling on a cushion or sitting on a stool next to the bathtub will reduce back strain. If you have to take the child out of the bath onto your lap, see the guidelines "Lifting and carrying".