

HANDWASHING TIPS FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA



Hand washing is crucial in reducing the risk of contracting the Coronavirus (CORVID-19) but many people with cognitive impairments and sensory difficulties can experience distress or struggle with the experience of hand washing. We've collated some advice for encouraging and improving hand washing.

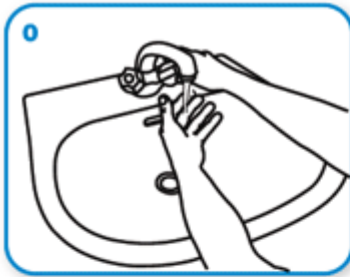
People with difficulties with Dementia can experience aversion to the smells, images, sounds and the tactile sensations of hand washing; have problems with balance, tone or co-ordinating their hand movements; not understand the step-by-step process of hand washing; or simply lose concentration and forget what they were doing. The following suggestions should be tailored to the specific challenges of the residents you are looking after.

EXPLAINING THE PROCESS OF HAND WASHING

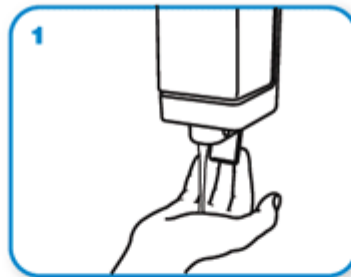
Use an illustrated guide to the process of hand washing to explain each individual step and help the individual understand what to expect. The World Health Organisation has published a [step-by-step guide to cleaning hands](#) which is on the next page.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION ADVICE ON WASHING HANDS PROPERLY

Washing your hands properly takes about as long as singing "Happy Birthday" twice, using the images below.



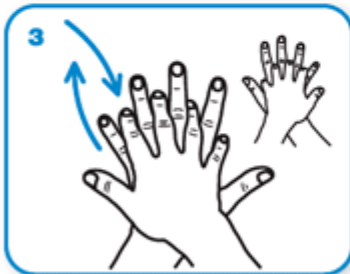
Wet hands with water



apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces.



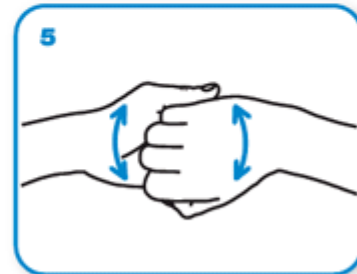
Rub hands palm to palm



right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa



palm to palm with fingers interlaced



backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



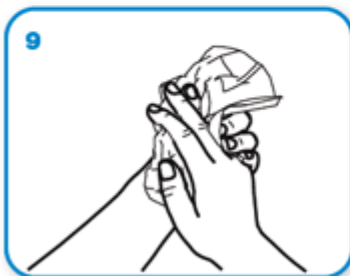
rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa



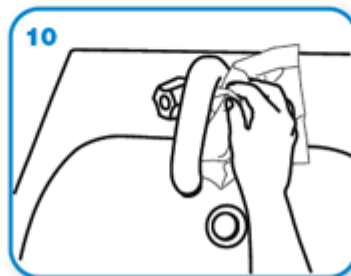
rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa.



Rinse hands with water



dry thoroughly with a single use towel



use towel to turn off faucet



...and your hands are safe.

PROMPTING HAND WASHING

You may need to prompt hand washing at all appropriate times, either verbally and/or by gesture (miming turning on a tap and rubbing hands together). It may help to have a handwashing poster or symbol on display by the sink. If required, you may need to physically help the individual to wash their hands. Remember to promptly give praise and acknowledgement each time.

TACKLING SENSORY ISSUES WITH SOAP

Find out if the individual has a preference for liquid soap or bars of solid soap. Find out if a particular smell is preferred or if they prefer unscented soap. Some people find it easier to manage soap when it is inside a fabric pouch so they only touch the soap suds and not the soap itself. An automatic soap dispenser which doesn't require you to pump the soap may be helpful.

WATER TEMPERATURE

Assessing a safe water temperature may be difficult for some individuals and they will need assistance. Some people may find slightly warm water more tolerable than cold water.

ANTIBACTERIAL HAND GEL

If soap and water are really not an option or available, then use antibacterial hand gel. You may need to demonstrate how to use this and assist. Again, you may need to investigate whether scented or unscented ones, gel or spray ones are preferred.

HAND LOTION

Some people with dementia are distracted by the tactile sensation after they have washed their hands: investigate if this is eased by using a preferred hand lotion immediately afterwards.

For more suggestions, support or if you have any questions about this information sheet please get in contact with the Edinburgh Behaviour Support Service on 0131 537 6044 or email us on EBSS@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk