

Bowel care

For most of us who are assisting a dying person with bowel care, we feel varying degrees of discomfort. Few of us are trained for this work and we focus too much on the 'yuck factor' when dealing with human waste. There is no shame in a caregiver stating that this is a boundary they cannot cross.

The task is far more manageable when you are equipped with the correct tools for the job, such as continence products or adult diapers, bed pans, wipes, bed pads, gloves, basin, and disinfectant. You may need to install a raised toilet seat or grab bars. If your person is unable to get to the bathroom, you may need to borrow a commode, perhaps from the Red Cross Home Equipment Loan Program. If you will need a commode for more than 90 days, you may consider purchasing one from a pharmacy home health department.

If you are unsure of whether you can give this level of care, learning more about bowel care may remove some of the anxiety and aid in your decision making. Training is available online. One source is the Family Caregiver Alliance, Caregiver Colleges Toileting and Incontinence [video](#) on YouTube. The Canadian Virtual Hospice also has a good [video](#) on giving bed baths, another [video](#) on helping someone with movement and turning in the bed, and yet another [video](#) on changing a bed with someone in it.

Depending upon who you are giving care to, this intimate form of care can be challenging. It can alter the relationship between you and your person, in particular, when the dying person is a parent or other family member of the opposite sex. You could ask your home care provider for some direction in minimizing the emotional discomfort or embarrassment for both you and the dying person.

If you are giving personal care to a person who is experiencing some level of cognitive impairment, you may be asked to report on bowel patterns to health care providers. To help you focus your comments, the following framework may be helpful.

Think **D. I. S. H.** (concept sourced from the LEAP Core manual, Pallium Canada)

Difficulty – more difficult having a bowel movement than usual?

Infrequent – more or less frequent than usual?

Size – smaller than usual?

Harder – harder than usual?

