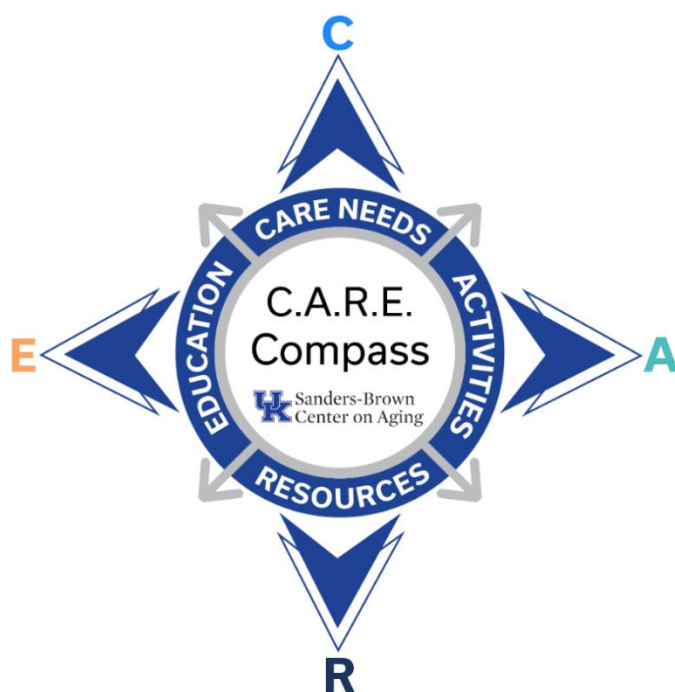


CARE Compass

Helping Navigate the Later Stages of Dementia



Dressing and Grooming

This project was made possible by a generous gift.

The goal of the program is to help provide tools and information so that you can navigate the later stages of dementia. We hope that you find these videos and resources to be helpful and encouraging.

This program is designed to be a guide only for the compassionate care and support of your loved one and is not medical advice. If you have questions or concerns, always check with your doctor.

We also want to acknowledge that late-stage dementia can look very different from person to person. Sometimes the ideas we share may not work or work for a short time. That is okay. No one person is alike, and what works today may not work tomorrow. We hope to provide tools that can be options for you to try.

This guide contains links and other resources that may not be provided by the presenter but are added to the guide to provide additional information and support.

In late-stage Alzheimer's, the brain can't process reasoning the way it used to. What feels like a simple, logical request ("let's put on clean clothes") can feel confusing, threatening, or even frightening to them. Resistance isn't stubbornness, it's often fear or disorientation.

Here are a few ways to approach it:

- **Pick your battles.** If the clothes are clean and there's no hygiene issue, it's okay to let them go. Comfort matters more than routine perfection.
- **Use gentle redirection.** Instead of "you need to change," try something like, "Let's get you into something cozy," or change at a natural transition (after a nap, before bed).
- **Make it feel like their idea.** Offering choices ("this shirt or that one?") can reduce resistance.
- **Change the environment, not the argument.** Sometimes laying out fresh clothes ahead of time or starting the process slowly (like handing them one item) works better than insisting on.
- **Watch for patterns.** Some people are more cooperative at certain times of day—lean into those windows.

In late-stage Alzheimer's disease, hygiene guidelines shift a bit from "routine" to "what's actually necessary and tolerable."

Ways to create a cooperative environment

If clothes are clean, dry, and odor-free, it's generally okay to go for 2–3 days in the same outfit without concern.

**Sometimes even longer (3–5 days) if changing causes significant distress and there's no hygiene issue*

- Noticeable odor
- Sweating or dampness
- Skin concerns (redness, irritation, pressure areas)

For things closer to the body:

- Underwear: ideally daily, but if that's a battle, prioritize when soiled
- Socks: every 1–2 days (more often if there are circulation or foot issues)

For outer clothing (shirts, pants, sweaters), you have more flexibility.

Remember: Clean enough + calm is better than perfectly clean + distressed.

With late-stage Alzheimer's disease, the goal is to reduce resistance and keep things calm. Here are some low-conflict tricks that tend to work

Use natural transition moments

People are often more cooperative when something already feels like it's changing.

- After waking up or before bed
- After using the bathroom
- After a meal or before going out (even if you're not actually going anywhere)

It feels less like a demand and more like part of the flow.

Swap logic for familiarity

Reasoning ("these clothes are dirty") usually doesn't land anymore. Instead:

- "Let's get you comfy"
- "These are your favorite"
- "Time to get ready for the day"

You're speaking to emotions and habits, not logic.

The "one step at a time" method

Don't present the whole outfit change.

- Hand them just a shirt
- Help them put on one sleeve
- Then continue gradually

Breaking it down avoids overwhelming them.

Gentle distraction

Shift attention away from the task:

- Turn on a favorite show or music
- Start a casual conversation
- Offer a snack or something to hold

Many caregivers find the person changes clothes almost "without noticing."

Mirror or modeling trick

- Change your own sweater or adjust your clothes in front of them
- Or say, "Let's both get comfortable"

It can trigger imitation without direct pressure.

The "laundry swap"

This one's a classic:

- Casually remove the current outfit ("let me freshen this up")
- Replace it quickly with a similar looking one

Works especially well if the new clothes look and feel familiar.

Stick with familiar styles

- Buy duplicates of favorite outfits
- Keep colors and textures similar

Reduces the chance they'll notice or resist something "new."

Join, don't force

If they resist:

- Pause
- Try again later with a different approach

Pushing usually escalates things; backing off often resets the moment.

The big picture

If you get *part* of the change done (clean shirt but same pants, for example), that's still a win. Partial success counts.

Websites With More Information

The link below is an adaptive clothing guide from AARP. Remember, magnetic closures, zippers, and Velcro can all be used to assist in making clothing adaptable

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/home-care/adaptive-clothing-guide>

The Alzheimer's Association provides information on dressing and grooming.

<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/dressing-grooming>

National Institute on Aging Article on Bathing Dressing and Grooming.

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-caregiving/alzheimers-caregiving-bathing-dressing-and-grooming>

Pro Tips and Best Practices

Set up for Success

Before setting up to assist your loved one in grooming or dressing, make sure they are relaxed before you approach them. If they are agitated about something and you try to initiate a care task, they will be more resistive in completing the care task.

Change the grooming tools

Instead of a handheld razor, use an electric shaver or a nail file instead of clippers.

Communication is Key

Explain what you are doing each step along the way. Use a calm, upbeat tone. Think about nonverbal communication, smile, and make eye contact.