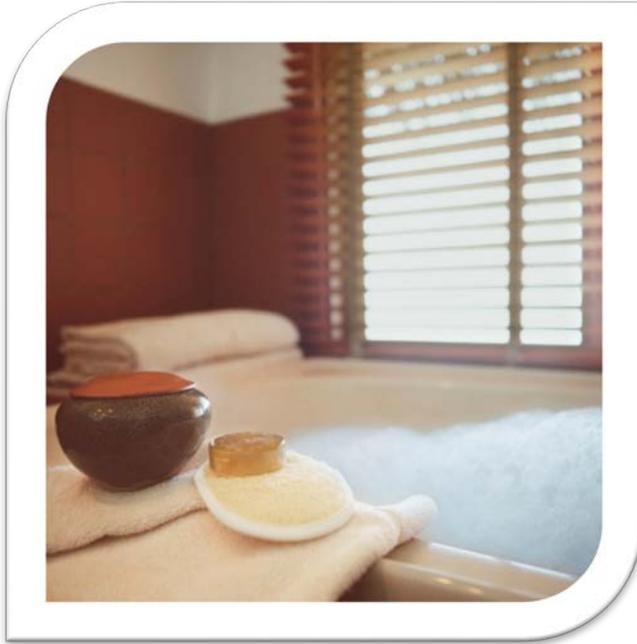


## AT FOR SAFE BATHING

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Did you know that every year about 235,000 people over the age of 15 visit emergency rooms as a result of injuries that occur in the bathroom? More than a third of these injuries happen while showering or bathing. If you are an older adult or have a disability, bathing can present additional challenges. Being able to bathe and shower independently not only allows you to maintain good personal hygiene but is also critical to remaining in your home.

Luckily, there are a variety of high- and low-tech assistive technology (AT) products available to make bathing safer and easier.

### Help to Get In and Out of the Tub

The riskiest part of bathing is slipping and falling while entering or exiting the bathtub or shower. Depending on your needs and resources, there are many products available to increase bathing safety. Anti-slip bath mats that are placed on the floor of the tub are simple, relatively inexpensive products that increase traction and help prevent slipping.

A variety of grab bars, handles, and supports can be installed throughout the bathroom to make getting in and out of the tub or shower more secure. There are handles on the market that screw into the wall for extra support as well as shower grip bars that use suction to provide reinforcement. Installing these grip supports is a small but important step in making your bathroom safer. These grip supports may be particularly useful if you have difficulty with balance or mobility issues as they can support extra weight to help prevent slipping.

Transfer chairs are another option to provide a secure way to get in and out of the tub. These chairs are designed to elevate, swivel, and lower you into the tub. They come in a variety of designs to meet the specific needs of those with upper and lower mobility impairments or who need caregiver assistance.

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If modifying the tub is an option, you can find tubs that do not have a lip or edge to step over, which can help prevent injury. There are walk-in tubs available that feature a swing open door, allowing you to enter the tub without stepping over a ledge. These types of tubs are often beneficial for individuals with mobility issues.

### Alternatives to Standing in the Bath

If you have difficulty standing or cannot stand for long periods of time, a variety of product options are available to aid with the bathing process. Standard bath boards and chairs provide stationary seating in the tub. Bath boards are slatted boards that sit on the bath tub edge, allowing you to enter the tub by sliding onto the board and bathe while seated. You can then use a hand-held shower head or sponge to bathe.

Bath chairs are designed for individuals who can get into the tub independently, but prefer to remain seated to bathe. Many bath chairs are movable and can be placed in the corner or middle of the shower or tub and provide relief from standing while bathing. You can purchase bath chairs that can be adhered to your tub or shower with suction cups to provide more stability. You can also buy bath chairs with more permanent fixtures to offer maximum support and eliminate the possibility that the chair itself will slip.



Image of bath chair. Source *Patterson Medical* ([www.pattersonmedical.com](http://www.pattersonmedical.com))

Battery operated bath lifts are powered devices that can help you get into the tub and be used as a seat during bathing. Battery operated lifts are equipped with a motor that gently lowers you into the tub. These lifts come with different features such as a reclining back, assorted height and weight capabilities, and various lowering abilities. You will need to consider these features carefully to find the product that best meets your needs.

### Low Tech Devices to Aid with Bathing

There are also simple tools available that can make washing yourself much easier. Long handled brushes and sponges may assist you if you have upper mobility difficulties or trouble bending. A wash mitt and towels with loops may also be helpful if you have grasping difficulties. Installing a simple hand held shower head can allow you more control of where the water goes and facilitates washing specific areas while requiring less mobility. Similarly, a terry cloth robe can be used in place of a towel for easier drying requiring less movement.

If you are experiencing pressure ulcers or bedsores, it is important to provide protection and comfort during bathing. Pressure relief cushions designed specifically for the bath are available and should be used in a similar manner as pressure cushions for other activities. A cushion can be used to elevate or help position the affected area. These pressure care products help to provide a comfortable bathing or showering experience by minimizing skin friction that can cause or aggravate sores. For those with a cast in place, a waterproof cast cover can be slipped over and used to protect the cast from getting wet.

## [More Resources](#)

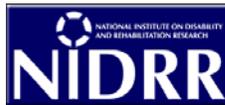
For more examples of AT that may be able to assist you, visit AbleData and look under Bathing: <http://abledata.com/abledata.cfm?pageid=19327&top=11860&deep=2&trail=2&ksectionid=19327>.

The following checklist ([http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/livable-communities/livable\\_communities\\_2010](http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/livable-communities/livable_communities_2010)) from AARP and the National Association of Home Builders may be helpful in considering bathroom settings that could enable you to bathe safely and independently. The list provides not only product suggestions, but recommended design improvements for a home bathroom that may increase safety, comfort, convenience, and livability:

- 36-inch-wide door for easy access, or pocket door
- Rocker-style light switches, 42 inches off the floor
- Lever handle, anti-scald faucets on sink, bathtub, and shower
- No threshold walk-in or roll-in shower with minimum dimensions 5 feet by 3 feet (4 feet preferred)
- Hand-held, adjustable-height showerhead with easily operable controls
- Maneuvering space that accommodates a 60-inch turning radius
- Toilet centered 18 inches from any side wall, tub, or cabinet
- Toilet seat 17 to 19 inches off floor for older persons, lower for children
- Grab bars or wall-blocking for future installation in tub, shower and near toilet
- Knee space under sink for seated users
- Easy-glide drawers that close automatically
- Countertops with rounded edges
- Bright, non-glare lighting
- Reduced-slip tile or non-skid floor
- D-shaped or pull-style cabinet and drawer handles
- Full-length and/or tilted mirror that can be used seated or standing
- Towel bars, soap and toothbrush holders 48 inches off floor
- Sink bowl mounted close to front edge of vanity for easier use while seated
- Integral transfer seat in tub and built-in bench or shower chair in shower
- Electrical outlets 18 inches off the floor

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