



Self Care Looking After My Body

Hair Washing and Styling Information Sheet

We all interpret information from the environment around us in different ways. Some people find certain types of input more distressing or distracting than others e.g. touch (tactile input). This discomfort may be particularly present with light touch on the skin, e.g. from a shower spray or being tickled. Unexpected sensory experiences can be threatening to children e.g. tickling someone from behind. **The head is particularly sensitive to touch**, which can make hair washing or cutting an uncomfortable and sometimes distressing experience.



Touch is a primary and basic sensory system, so when children are sensitive to touch they may react negatively to touch input e.g. screaming, crying or hitting back. This is because the nervous system is interpreting the stimulus as potentially harmful or dangerous. Try the following strategies to support your child for hair washing:

- Keeping your child's hair short makes hair washing/rinsing much easier.
- Using dry shampoo (available from pharmacies and supermarkets) between hair washes can reduce the frequency that you need to wash your child's hair.
- If your child's hair is short, a wet flannel or washer may be enough to wet and then rinse your child's hair.
- Some children do not like water in their ears – try ear plugs to protect them.
- A flannel or small towel held over eyes and face (you can even try and encourage your child to hold the flannel themselves). A hair washing 'hat', available from many pharmacies and supermarkets, can also help keep water out of eyes/off the face or even try goggles or a snorkel mask.
- Experiment with shower versus the bath. If you have a shower over the bath try taking the detachable hose off the hook and using it on a low pressure setting to rinse your child's hair.
- Try using a jug or water cupped in your hands to wet and rinse your child's hair.
- Experiment with unscented shampoo.
- Preparing your child for the task is important and using visual supports for hair washing can help many children. Use a picture to represent the hair washing with a picture to represent a preferred activity such as snack or TV. Explain to your child that first he will have his hair washed, then he can have his snack.
- Wash your child's hair over the sink or a basin – some children can tolerate leaning forward to wet their hair better than lying down in the bath with their head back.
- Sometimes children are more tolerant of sensations when they are in control of them. Encourage your child to become independent in washing their own hair.





- Try talking to your child about what it is they don't like about hair washing: it may be fear of getting water in their eyes, a dislike of the feeling of wet hair, the scent of the shampoo.
- Try using hair washing brushes when attempting to wash hair to assist in spreading shampoo.



Etac Long Handled Beauty Hair Washer



Denman D6 Shampoo/Shower Brush



- Use a shampoo which comes in pump or soap style bar, to prevent having to squeeze shampoo out of bottle. Additionally consider using a combined shampoo and conditioner as this will allow reduce number of times that you are required to spread shampoo/conditioner in your hair.
- Select a shampoo which develops a lot of lather, as this will reduce the amount of effort required to spread shampoo within hair.

Helping Children to Become Independent

Children with learning difficulties, delayed motor skills or physical disabilities may be slower to become independent with washing their hair than other children. These strategies may support your child to become independent with the task, or aspects of the task.

- Children who have balance difficulties may find it easier to sit when learning to wash their own hair. This may mean sitting in the bath or on a shower chair for the shower.
- Use shampoo and conditioner in a pump bottle as it can be easier to control than turning and squeezing a bottle with one hand into the other.
- Keep your child's shampoo/conditioner/soap/wash cloth in a separate caddy or plastic basket. Help your child easily identify each container by putting a different coloured scrunchie or sticker around each bottle.
- Break the task of hair washing down and encourage your child to be confident and independent in one step before moving onto the next, for example encourage your child to put shampoo on their hand then head, you then take over for lathering the hair and rinsing.
- Use picture cards for each step of the task, (wet hair, shampoo from bottle, lather hair, rinse), laminate and tape to the wall of the shower or bath.





- A mirror may help your child see what they are doing, to ensure they can reach their whole head/all their hair.
- Shorter hair is easier to wash than longer hair. Particularly while your child is learning to wash her hair, it may be easier to keep it shoulder length or shorter.

Hair Brushing

- Try using a thick or wide handled brush as this will be easier to grip and will place less strain on finger joints.
- If you struggle to reach the back of your hair consider trying a long handled hair brush or comb as this will prevent from over reaching.
- Consider using a detangling spray if your hair is thick and known to be difficult to brush/comb.
- Consider a wide toothed comb as this will cut down the resistance on hair.

Hair Styling

- Consider letting hair air dry rather than use a hair dryer as this will place less strain on joints.
- Consider using hair ties such as the items suggested below; these will be easier to manipulate as they feature less elastic than standard hair ties



Spiral Hairband



Ribbon Hair Tie



Hair Bungee

- Experiment with different hairstyles, for example styles which are formed lower down on head e.g. placing hair in bunches.
- Ask your child to try leaning their elbows against a surface when attempting to brush their hair as this will provide them with greater stability and allow them to achieve greater strength when brushing their hair.
- If they wish to blow dry their own hair, consider using a hair dryer stand or clamp which will allow you to position your head rather than grasp hair dryer. When they are drying the front of their hair use the cooler air setting, and the hot air switch when they are trying the back of their hair.

