

In this article...

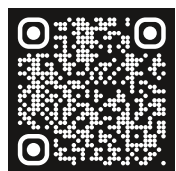
- Considerations when undertaking bed bathing of patients
- How waterless bathing offers a viable alternative to soap and water
- The benefits of disposable wipes for bathing patients confined to bed

A patient-centric approach to bed bathing



SPONSORED
CONTENT

For more
information visit:
[vernacare.com](https://www.vernacare.com)



Key points

Reliance on intimate care has been reported by patients as undignifying and nurses must consider ways to maintain a patient's self-esteem and dignity

Bed bathing should present nurses with a valuable opportunity for an uninterrupted holistic assessment of their patient

Patient choice should be factored into care provision, with shared decision making whenever bed baths are considered necessary

Patients living with dementia may find traditional bathing methods and hair washing a confusing and threatening experience

Waterless bed bathing contributes to a reduction in healthcare-associated infections and avoids costly laundry expenditure

Author Denise Eaton is senior clinical editor, *Nursing Times*.

Abstract The ability to use best practice approaches for care and personal hygiene purposes extends to one of the fundamental aspects of nursing – bed washing a patient. However routine it might seem, a patient-centric approach should always be adopted for what is an intimate and intrusive procedure. This article will examine the benefits of disposable wipes when bathing patients confined to bed in a care setting, comparing the experience with the more traditional method of soap and water. The article will focus on patient choice and comfort, personal hygiene aspects, as well as the time benefits to nurses performing routine care.

Citation Eaton D (2024) A patient-centric approach to bed bathing. *Nursing Times* [online] 120: 3.

Bed baths serve a number of needs for patients who are unable to undertake more conventional forms of washing, including maintaining personal hygiene and promoting psychological wellbeing (Konya et al, 2021). Assisting someone with their personal hygiene needs is a fundamental nursing activity that, according to Groven et al (2017), relates to both quality of care and quality of life. To be able to support the hygiene needs of a patient is considered a core function that all newly registered nurses should be able to aptly demonstrate in order to meet proficiency outcomes (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2018).

Such an intimate procedure should allow the nurse protected time to interact with their patient and enhance the patient-nurse relationship, but it should also present a valuable opportunity for a holistic assessment to be carried out without interruption. It also allows time to address any concerns patients may harbour, and provides a valuable opportunity to assess and monitor skin integrity (Lawton and Shepherd, 2019).

In all circumstances, the patient's preferences should be considered and Vege et al (2019) recommend shared decision making between patient and practitioner whenever bed baths are deemed necessary, with preferences expressed by the patient, where possible, incorporated into the procedure (Fig 1).

With patient reliance upon intimate care being the aspect of care that is most reported as undignifying (Ekpenyong et al, 2021), nurses must consider ways in which to mitigate such negative concerns. Lawton and Shepherd (2019) state that offering patients the chance to participate in this routine can help to maintain a patient's self-esteem and dignity, as well as contribute towards maintaining their independence. Care considered to be dignified can also help improve patient recovery while, conversely, undignified care can lead to feelings of worthlessness and depression (Ekpenyong et al, 2021).

According to Groven et al (2019), bed-bound patients often perceive bed baths as having a negative impact on both physical and emotional comfort, with the standard soap and water in a bowl approach

Fig 1. **A patient-centric approach to bed bathing**

Gentle skin care

Ageing has a degenerative effect on the skin leaving it more vulnerable to damage. Recent studies suggest that skin-wiping pressure during bathing should be controlled and evaluated

Providing comfort

Those living with dementia may find the rush of water from an overhead shower frightening or disorientating. Adaptations should be made to accommodate this

Relationship building and interaction

Assisting with basic hygiene creates a personal connection between the care provider and the patient. As well as maintaining health, bathing is also an opportunity to check for lesions or pressure ulcers

Maintaining dignity

Best practice suggests that only the area of the body being cleansed should be uncovered and that blankets could be used to limit exposure and provide dignity

Participation in care

If a bed bath is required, it is important to offer patients the opportunity to participate in their own care, which helps to maintain their independence, self-esteem and dignity

Providing choices

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence advises adoption of an individualised approach to healthcare that is tailored to the patient's needs and circumstances



considered embarrassing and uncomfortable, not to mention physically demanding for the nurse and patient.

In one study cited by Groven et al (2019), most patients maintained they would rather replace the soap and water method with washing without water. Regardless, most bed-bound patients are still cleaned with soap and water (Groven et al, 2019), even though patient choice should always be factored into the routine care procedure, and nurses should recognise that bed-bound patients have varying preferences (Vege et al, 2019).

It is also worth considering that patients living with dementia, particularly in the advanced stages, may find traditional bathing methods and hair washing a confusing and threatening experience. Perception problems leave those affected unable to distinguish depth, making it scary to step into the water. They may also be unable to see water in the same way as before, so may experience hair washing as being hit on the head by an almost invisible force (Alzheimer's Association, nd; Independent Living, nd).

The Conti® brand, owned by Vernacare, benefits from 40 years of research and experience developing and manufacturing hygiene solutions for the care sector and its Waterless Bathing range offers a selection of products created especially for assisted bathing. Among them is an effective solution for hair washing without water. A pre-impregnated shampoo cap

“Patients living with dementia, particularly in the advanced stages, may find traditional bathing methods and hair washing a confusing and threatening experience”

activates a unique blend of cleansers and conditioners through a gentle massaging action, which releases a rinse formulation into the hair. The hydrophilic fabric absorbs oil and dirt from the hair, keeping it fully contained within the shampoo cap. There is no rinsing involved throughout the easy-to-use process, offering a completely rinse-free hair wash (Fig 2).

Cleansing and conditioning washcloths and wash mitts complete the Conti® Waterless Bathing range with both cloths and mitts created using a unique pH-balanced formula to promote clean, soft and healthy skin. Products are designed for optimal ease of use and comfort for the patient with a quick-drying action avoiding the need for towel drying or excessive rubbing, helping to maintain the skin's integrity.

The ‘bag bath’ concept was introduced as an alternative to washing with soap and water in 1990, initially as a method to address shortcomings related to skin integrity and hygiene, and involved non-disposable washcloths placed in a bag together with a cleansing fluid diluted in

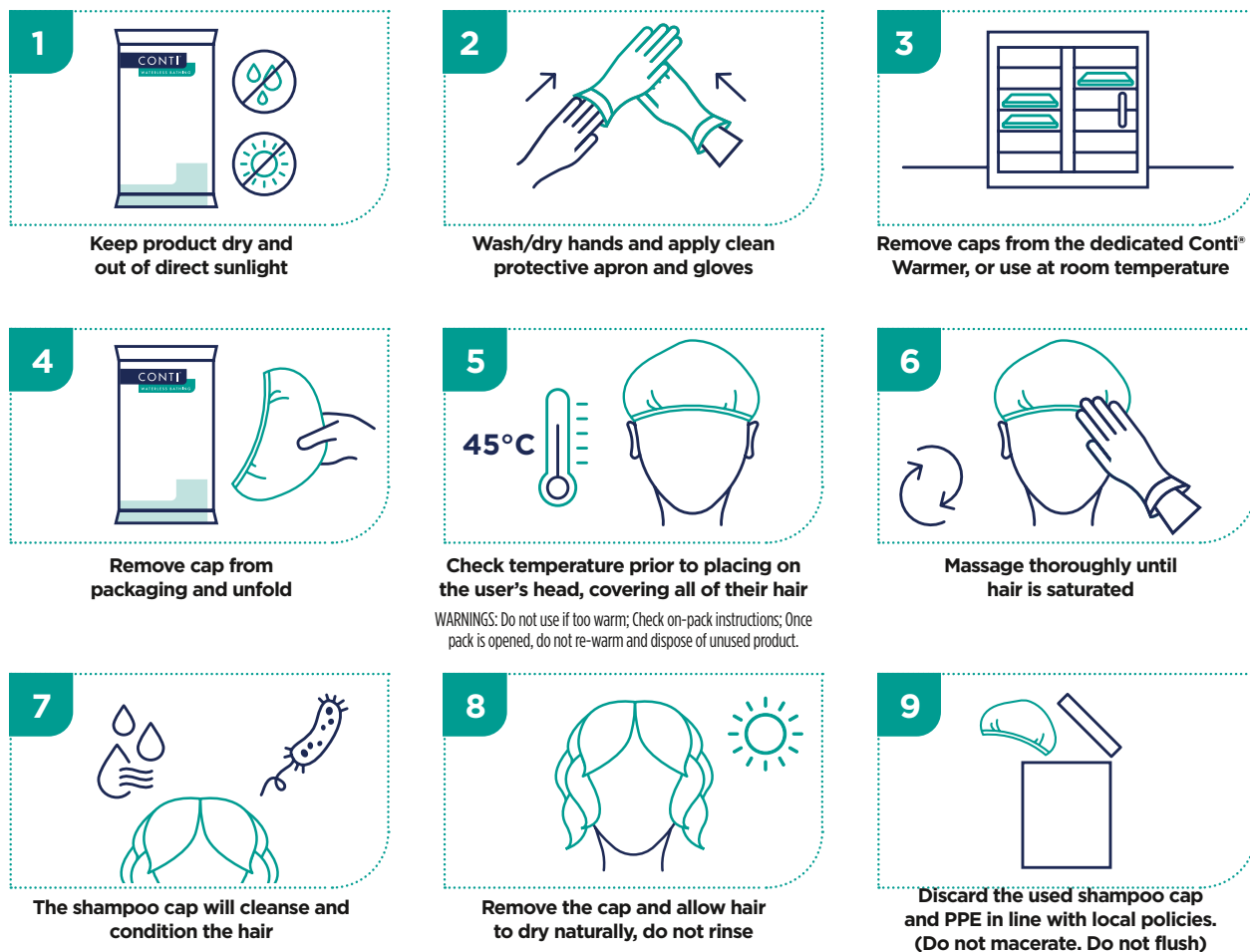
water (Groven et al, 2017). Pre-packed disposable wipes evolved from this concept a few years later and offered a viable alternative to the traditional bed bathing method of using soap and water, with the further development of products now providing a more convenient way of delivering hygiene care.

An experimental study by Tai et al (2021) examined both methods of bathing critically ill patients, comparing, among other things, the length of time taken to carry out a full body wash and the cost involved. Results from the research demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the time taken to complete a bed wash, with the mean bath duration for disposable wipes at 23.8 minutes against 34.4 minutes for the soap and water approach. And, although the cost of consumables was significantly higher for the method using disposable wipes, once laundry and nursing labour costs were taken into consideration – NHS England spent more than £224m on laundry and linen costs in 2021-22 (NHS Digital, 2022) – the overall cost of bed baths with disposable wipes was significantly lower than for the more traditional method (Tai et al, 2021). Such findings, along with other issues associated with soap and water washes, are highlighted by Vernacare (Fig 3).

According to Martin et al (2017), another advantage to removing wash bowls from the bedside is that it

Fig 2. How to use Conti's® rinse-free shower cap

The Conti® Waterless Bathing range provides a convenient and effective solution for bed-bound hair cleansing. Pre-impregnated with a unique blend of cleaners and conditioners, a massaging action releases a rinse formulation into the hair and hydrophilic (water-loving) fabric absorbs oil and dirt retaining it within the cap.



contributes to a reduction in healthcare-associated infections. One study found the simple act of eliminating soap and water from the bedside led to a statistically significant drop in healthcare-associated infections and the transfer of multi-drug resistant organisms, with the recommendation that all portable wash bowls be replaced with pre-packaged wipes for patient bathing (Martin et al, 2017).

Using pre-packaged wipes also provides a significant improvement in skin integrity, with conventional soap and wash bowl methods possibly contributing to skin deterioration owing to changes in skin pH, skin-drying effects of traditional cleansers and friction caused by washcloths (Martin et al, 2017). Wipes such as the Conti® range produced by Vernacare are manufactured to match the

pH balance of the skin, with additional emollients to reduce irritation during cleansing. This helps maintain the integrity of the skin, helping to provide a natural barrier to potential infection. This and a list of other benefits can be found in Fig 4.

Vernacare's Conti® wipes are made from sustainable plant-based materials. The UK-based manufacturing plant enables the production of larger flow-wrap packs with clip-lock lids – providing a viable alternative to plastic containers. Its bed bathing range offers a choice of supporting products, including a range of infection prevention products to support washing without water. As well as flushable wipes, there are also wipes specifically designed to be disposed of in a hospital macerator. Its Conti® products offer a

range of skincare solutions that are designed to protect skin and minimise the risk of infection. Products help reduce healthcare-associated infections and outbreaks while also offering time-saving solutions for nurses.

Conclusion

Switching from the traditional wash bowl to waterless bathing for patients confined to bed offers better patient choice and an individualised approach to healthcare delivery. It helps eliminate fear and confusion for those living with dementia, contributes to a reduction in healthcare-associated infections, avoids costly laundry expenditure, saves nurses time at the bedside, improves skin integrity and comfort, and delivers better all-in-one care. **NT**

Fig 3. Inherent issues with traditional soap and water approach to bathing

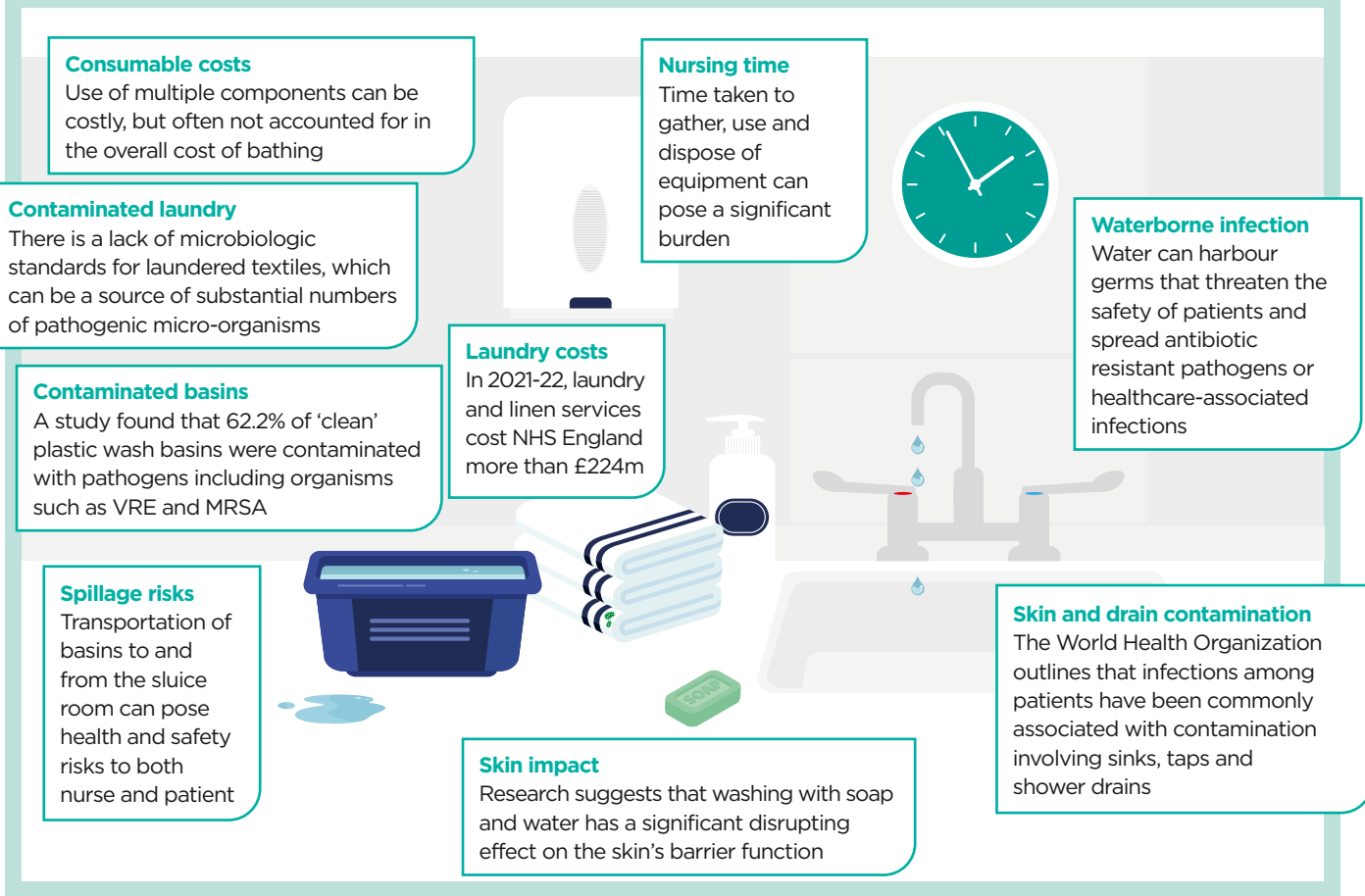
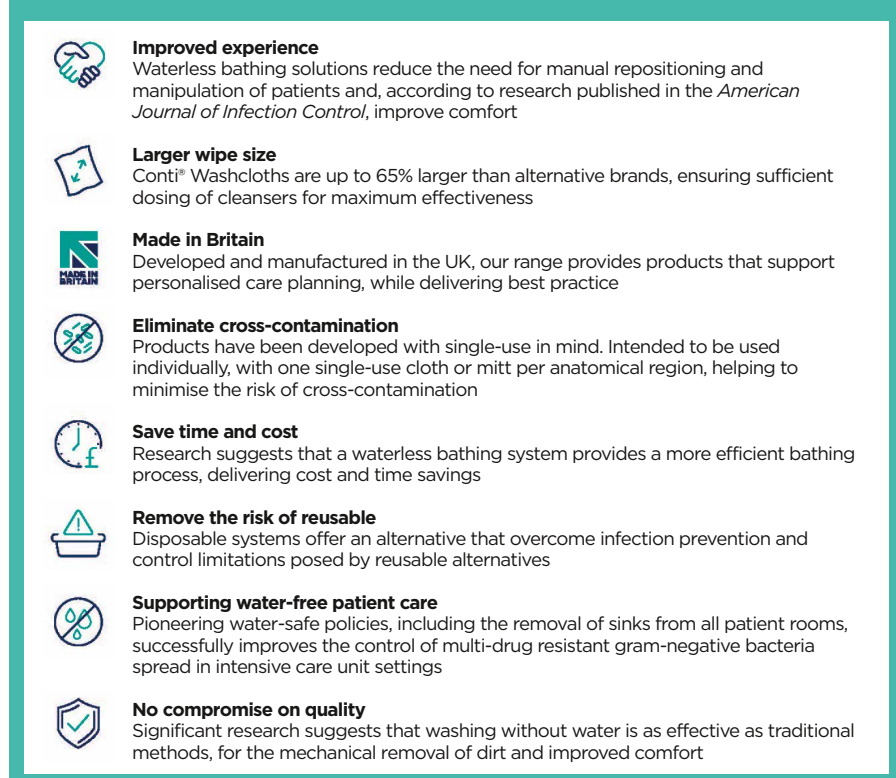


Fig 4. Benefits of using Conti's® Waterless Bathing products



References

- Alzheimer's Association (nd) Bathing. *alz.org* (accessed 27 April 2023).
- Ekpenyong MS et al (2021) Exploring the perceptions of dignity among patients and nurses in hospital and community settings: an integrative review. *Journal of Research in Nursing*; 26: 6, 517-537.
- Groven FMV et al (2019) The effects of washing without water versus the traditional bed bath with water and soap on comfort and physical demands: protocol of a crossover randomized trial. *Research Square* (accessed 21 April 2023).
- Groven FMV et al (2017) How does washing without water perform compared to the traditional bed bath: a systematic review. *BMC Geriatrics*; 17: 31.
- Independent Living (nd) Dementia and aquaphobia. *independentliving.co.uk* (accessed 26 April 2023).
- Konya I et al (2021) Effectiveness of bed bath methods for skin integrity, skin cleanliness and comfort enhancement in adults: A systematic review. *Nursing Open*; 8: 5, 2001- 2908.
- Lawton S, Shepherd E (2019) The underlying principles and procedure for bed bathing patients. *Nursing Times*; 115: 5, 45-47.
- Martin ET et al (2017) Bathing hospitalized dependent patients with pre-packaged disposable washcloths instead of traditional bath basins: a case-crossover study. *American Journal of Infection Control*; 45: 9, 990-994.
- NHS Digital (2022) *NHS Digital Estates Return Information Collection (ERIC)*. NHS Digital.
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2018) *Future Nurse: Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses*. NMC.
- Tai CH et al (2021) The effect of two bed bath practices in cost and vital signs of critically ill patients. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*; 18: 2, 816.
- Vege PL et al (2019) Bed bath with soap and water or disposable wet wipes: patients' experiences and preferences. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*; 28: 38.