



## Tips on Dressing with Ease

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Dressing and undressing are often challenging tasks for people with limited mobility. While buttoning buttons and zipping zippers are frustrating for some, others may have difficulty reaching arms through armholes or inserting legs through leg-holes. Selecting attire to meet individual needs can make dressing easier and may eliminate unnecessary aggravation and fatigue. Getting dressed everyday will boost one's self-esteem, even if one is homebound.

In general, clothing should not restrict joint motion. Lightweight or stretch-knit fabrics permit greater freedom of movement. Roomy armholes and garments that open in the front prevent the need to raise arms over the head and are easier to put on and take off. Large buttons, hooks and snaps are fasteners that are easy-to-use. Velcro closures require little finger/hand coordination, can replace standard fasteners, and are concealed under the openings of shirts, blouses, dresses and pants. Zippered fronts on tops and dresses also offer accessibility. Buttons sewn on with elastic thread make buttoning less tedious.

Fabric loops, sewn inside pants and underwear, make it simpler to pull pants up and down. Trousers with elastic waistbands or drawstrings and underpants

with wide leg openings or boxer shorts make dressing easier.

Leg-brace wearers should choose knit pants loose enough to pull over braces.

Wrap-around skirts go on better than skirts that fasten in the back and the style can accommodate weight changes. Wearing a wrap-around skirt (with the opening in the back), as well as drop-easy pants, are ideal when using the toilet. By wearing culottes, ladies can enjoy the look of a skirt and the convenience of pants. Pulling a slip over the head can be avoided by wearing a half-slip. Front-fastening bras or all-stretch bras permit more independence in dressing.

Some people find dressing safer and easier while lying down, especially when pulling up pants; while others prefer to sit on the edge of the bed or chair. Those with one side weaker than the other should dress the weaker side first. Dressing aids are also available to help persons dress and undress. Some devices include:

- A dressing stick with a hook on the end to assist in pulling up pants without bending over
- Buttoners to pull buttons through button holes<sup>1</sup>
- Zipper pulls to open and close zippers
- Stocking aids to pull on socks or stockings

- Long wooden scissors for reaching clothing

- Long-handled shoehorn to help slide the foot into the shoe

What to wear on the feet depends on one's ability to walk. Persons with weak ankles and feet may benefit from an evaluation by a physical therapist. Lightweight, supportive shoes may be recommended for walking, and possibly for brace support. Some persons prefer smooth-soled shoes or moccasins because rubber-soled shoes may cause tripping. However, wheelchair users may prefer shoes with rubber soles to help keep the feet from slipping off wheelchair footplates.

To put laced shoes on and off with ease and without having to re-tie them, use elastic laces. Other types of easy-access shoes are loafers or shoes with Velcro fasteners across the top. For added convenience, women can wear thigh-high hosiery or knee socks with skirts instead of pantyhose. Wearing knee-high fashion boots or calf high leg warmers are ideas for hiding leg braces when wearing a skirt.

Persons who are sedentary should choose accessible clothing that not only feels comfortable, but also looks attractive. A flexible fabric, such as a soft cotton/polyester blend, moves with the body and provides the most comfort. Loose tops, which are worn on the outside of pants and skirts, look and feel the best. Wheelchair users find short jackets, ponchos or capes

more convenient than long coats. Men who wear suits may need to alter their suits by adding extra room in the shoulders and the seat. Many men find it helpful to use clip-on ties or ready-tied ties with a Velcro fastener. Dresses and skirts that are cut fuller in the hips prevent "riding up" when sitting.

Although outfits with fullness are comfortable, excess fullness in the sleeves, pant legs, and skirts can get caught in wheelchair spokes and cause tripping. Sitters should avoid wearing pants with heavy seams that may cause pressure areas when sitting.

The comfortableness of a fabric depends on the way it feels, the amount of heat it retains, and the manner in which it absorbs moisture. Because immobility and loss of subcutaneous fat can cause some persons to feel cold, wearing several layers of lightweight clothing retains heat and is more effective in keeping warm than wearing heavy clothing. Lightweight clothing made of terrycloth or cotton flannelette may feel comfortable both in the summer and winter.

Color and texture are important factors for dressing with ease, style and comfort. Colorful tops add brilliance to basic slacks and skirts. Fleecewear is both functional and fashionable, and is easy to wear anytime, anywhere. The young-at-hearts who like denims will find stone-washed cotton the softest.

Slippery fabrics, such as nylon, allow the body to glide easier from one surface to another, which includes transferring from bed to the chair. Wearing nylon or satin pajamas helps a person with limited mobility to move, turn

and slide more easily in bed. Persons with breathing problems should wear loose-fitting tops or have wide-open necklines. They should also avoid hairy fabrics, like mohair, as floating filaments could be inhaled.

Dressing for success means wearing clothes that are easy to wear, attractive, and comfortable all the time. Finding solutions to dressing problems will take the stress out of dressing. And feeling your best begins by looking your best.

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