

# When how you look no longer seems to be important...

## What is neglecting personal care?

Neglecting personal care is no longer caring about showering and dressing, and not feeling like cooking or eating meals. This lack of care with the way one looks and well being may be due to a range of problems including:

- Apathy
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Changes due to surgery or treatment.

## How do I know if I am neglecting myself or not looking after myself?

- Not showering or washing your hair on a regular basis.
- If female, no longer caring about your looks such as wearing makeup or putting on nice clothes.
- Sitting around in pyjamas all day.
- Not worrying about trying to eat or having healthy meals.
- Avoid looking in the mirror because feeling upset about changes in looks because of:
  - o Scarring from surgery
  - o Hair loss from 'chemo'
  - o Changes to shape of face (becoming rounder and flatter – cushingoid) from steroid medications
  - o Putting on weight or losing a lot of weight due to treatment.

## 'Sandra's' Story

'Sandra' is a 38-year-old woman with a high-grade brain tumour. Since her diagnosis, she has needed a lot of help to carry out simple tasks such as personal care. 'Sandra' could not shower or get ready to go out by herself. She needed many prompts to do things such as rinse her hair after

shampooing, and to wash all parts of her body, particularly her back or legs. When dressing, she sometimes put her clothes on inside out or back to front and did not notice.

## Strategies

### For the person with a brain tumour

- With your family member break down tasks into steps and tick off each step when done (see Check List for Getting Ready).
- Set up a daily routine where you shower, clean your teeth and eat meals at the same time.
- Use a weekly timetable to set out activities and set times for all tasks including personal care.
- Use a Dosette box or Webster pack for any pills.
- Ask for help.
- Make sure you shower or take a bath every day.
- Always wear clean clothes that are tidy and ironed.
- Make sure you clean your teeth at least once per day (preferably twice).
- Use makeup to cover any scarring or facial changes, seek advice on makeup usage.
- Go to the hairdresser and seek advice about hairstyles after your surgery and keeping your hair in better condition.
- Use clothing or accessories to cover any unsightly scars.
- Purchase clothing in the right size to address any changes in your body from weight loss or gain.

## KEY FACTS

- A survey of people with a brain tumour found that 9% sometimes or frequently neglected their personal care.
- Carers of people with a brain tumour who were surveyed indicated that 10% found the personal habits of their relative were very poor and they needed prompts from others.

### For the carer/family member

- If a person is finding it hard to keep to a personal care routine, try giving regular prompts, but do not do everything for them.
- Give the person choices about what to do next to lower feelings of powerlessness.
- Set up tick lists, timetables or whiteboards with a daily or weekly routine (see Resource sheet – Timetable).
- Help them in setting out clothes for the day and the selection of appropriate clothing for their weight changes or the weather.
- Give them positive feedback and reassurance about their appearance when they make an effort.

## Questions to ask your health professional

- What is the cause of the thinking problems?
- Is it related to the tumour itself?
- Is it related to the treatments given for the tumour or other medications?
- Could the thinking problems be an unrelated medical condition and does this need treatment in itself?
- Do I/we expect the thinking problems to get better or worse over time?
- Are there any medications that can help the problem?
- Can a psychologist help to treat this problem?
- Are there any diet or lifestyle factors that can help the thinking problems?
- Who else could I speak with to help with the thinking problems?

### Links to other information:

- Resource Sheet – Check List for Getting Ready
- Resource Sheet – Timetable