

Adaptive Technology--The Joys of a Shower!

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Imagine coming home from a long day, jumping into a warm shower and letting water ease your body and quiet your mind. Now picture someone telling you that for the rest of your life, from this moment on, your personal hygiene would consist of a sponge bath every day. How would you feel knowing you would never again feel truly clean, never again be able to use a shower as a pick me up to start your day or as a means to help you relax? How would you feel?

Did you know that there are millions of Americans who face this dilemma daily? I am speaking of the 1.6 million individuals who are in wheelchairs residing outside of institutions. People like Albert “Bud” Sayles, now 49, who sustained a spinal cord injury at the age of 18; or Michael, a 44 year old with Multiple Sclerosis; or Margaret, a 93 year old stroke victim - all of whom were unable to remodel their homes due to finances, structural challenges or because they were renting.

Bud Sayles lives in a home that has structural features which prohibit remodeling. The only time in the last 31 years he had access to a shower was when he was traveling and able to stay in an accessible hotel room. Michael lives in a rental home – not only is he unable to remodel, he cannot even get his wheelchair into the bathroom, so he takes a “shower” outside in the yard with a garden hose. (Home health nurses can verify this is not an isolated instance.) And Margaret lives in an apartment with her husband. Although her bathroom has a shower stall, she is too unsteady on her feet and her husband lacks the strength and agility needed to help her in and out of the shower.

Then there's the countless number of Americans, mostly seniors, not in wheelchairs but who are too weak or lack the stamina or stability to step over a rail into shower. There are alternative systems, but users have to suffer the indignity of being hoisted into the air by a lift system or slid over on a conveyor device such as a slide chair, or handled physically and fear being dropped. Although these systems provide an alternative to bed baths, the bathing procedure is lengthy, scary, and often only provided once a week due to the length of time and handling it takes.

Bud, Michael and Margaret are the lucky ones. Until recently they shared the bathing dilemma with millions; but then they were introduced to the FAWSSit™ Fold Away Wheelchair Shower, a product from Care Giver Support Products, LLC. (CGSP). The FAWSSit™ is a portable self contained shower, complete with shower head, drain pan and pump to remove waste water. It can be set up anywhere there is access to warm water and an electrical outlet. Now they can remain safe and secure in their wheelchair while being rolled into the FAWSSit™, sit under the shower head to enjoy the warm stream of water, and then be wheeled out feeling truly clean. They no longer have to suffer the indignity of being lifted, or slid; or suffer the fear of being dropped by a caregiver.

Because the shower weighs less than forty pounds and folds up to a mere six inches in depth it can be easily stored when not in use. This feature also makes it ideal for traveling, whether to a relatives' home for interim care or on a vacation, allowing the person to take the comfort of a shower with them.

The FAWSsit™ is still very new to the market, but when Larry Weinstein, AARPs' National Livable Homes Consultant he saw it he stated: "This is the first truly revolutionary product for home health care that I have seen in thirty years. It's simple, practical and affordable." When executives and athletes saw the FAWSsit™ at the 25th Annual VA games in Minnesota recently they were very impressed. One executive stated "This can be the solution for both our newly disabled veterans in wheelchairs and all veterans in wheelchairs who have not yet been able to get their homes remodeled for accessibility"; and one of the Veterans said: "This would be ideal for all of us in wheelchairs who still love to camp and hunt as well. We could take the shower with us wherever we go."

Care Giver Support Products, LLC was founded by a group of five individuals who have all been care givers and faced the issues involved with providing hygiene for others. Because of their own individual care giving experiences, the members share a passion for providing dignity, comfort and cleanliness to those in need, and for providing safety and ease of use to those providing the care. And, all are delighted they are able to assist people in reclaiming a part of the life they had lost, by using this adaptive technology.

How have they done? Ask Bud. He and his wife were overcome with emotion when they called CGSP to tell them how happy they were. Or ask Michael, who no longer has to shower outside, but enjoys sitting under the shower head until the water turns cold; or ask Margaret's husband who said "I was so afraid I was going to lose my wife to a nursing home because I couldn't provide her with personal care. Now I can keep her home with me where she belongs."

Care Giver Support Products, LLC can be reached at www.fawssit.com, or Toll free at 1-877 FAWSsit (1-877 329-7748).

As of 2004 America has 1.6 million people in wheel chairs. Bathing is the activity most likely to present problems with 72% limited in this activity. The statistics are as follows:

- *Spinal cord injuries, 250,000 – of those 52% are paraplegic and 47% are quadriplegic. 88.3% return home, 5.1% transfer to a nursing home and 6.6 are hospitalized*
- *Stroke - 180,00*
- *Arthritis - 170,00*
- *Multiple Sclerosis - 82,000*
- *Absence or loss of extremity – 60,000*
- *Orthopedic impairment of lower extremity – 59,000*
- *Heart Disease (Type unspecified) – 54,000*
- *Cerebral Palsy – 51,000*
- *Rheumatoid Arthritis – 49,000*
- *Diabetes – 39,000*

**** Not noted are those individuals who require a wheelchair on a temporary basis, those returning home after an illness or surgery.*