

# DRESSING STRATEGIES AND ADAPTATIONS

## Consider Student's:

- Health, fatigue level, vision and hearing
- Muscle tone: is one side more affected?
- Ability to control his/her own movements to participate
- Position/equipment used (e.g., bench, chairs, wheelchair)
- Clothing options (looser fitting and stretchy garments are easier to manage than snug and stiff items)
- Ability to understand language or other cues

## Tips:

- Approach your student on the involved side (e.g. high tone or weaker side)
- Have all clothes ready before you start and have the student help to lay them out in the correct orientation (a pullover shirt should be face down with the bottom edge closest to the student)
- If the student does not use a wheelchair, provide a safe but firm seat off the floor with feet supported – a low chair, a bench, or the bottom edge of the cubby. The student should be able to lean forward at the waist and bend both hips and knees.
- Get your student's attention and talk about what you're doing
- Before putting on the garment, prepare the involved arm by slowly stretching the arm up, higher than the shoulder. Bend the hip, knee, and foot on the involved leg before putting on socks and shoes. This helps keep the toes from curling.
- Encourage your student to look at and touch the garment and the body parts you are dressing.
- The affected (weaker or high tone) side goes in **first** in **dressing**
- The affected (weaker or high tone) side comes out **last** in **undressing**
- When putting the affected arm in a sleeve, try guiding from the back of the upper arm, so that the student's arm is away from the body, rotated out slightly and fairly straight. This position helps the student work towards an open hand.
- Pulling fingers through a sleeve will only bend the elbow of the involved arm. If you need to pull, guide the arm from the student's shoulder. Then, hold the student's whole hand and gently rotate the thumb upward. Pull slowly as the resistance releases.
- Watch for signs that your student is interested in participating. Give help **before** the student is frustrated and praise successes.

- **Backward Chaining:** Ask the student to participate most actively in the final stage of the activity. Break the task into small steps, the helper completes most of the task and leaves the final stage for the student to complete. Once he/she is able to complete that step, the helper leaves the last two steps for the student to complete and so on. This way he/she will have a sense of accomplishment in always completing the task.

## Positioning:

Choose a place where you can comfortably support and help your student. Prepare the area first and have clothes handy.

- A student with poor stability needs to be on a low bench or chair with their feet on the floor and their back supported. Sitting on a chair or stool against the wall is helpful, or against the corner of the wall.
- If your student needs help to balance when sitting, use your knees to support the student's hips. Take the support away as soon as you can.
- Sitting in front of a mirror can help the student keep their head forward to see what they are doing when participating in their dressing routine.

For further positioning information, consult with your local Occupational Therapist.

## Adapted Clothing:

[Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive](#) (ships to Canada) and [Target: Cat and Jack Adapted Clothing](#) (ships to Canada); both offer a variety of stylish clothing involving the following adaptations:

- Sensory friendly flat seams
- No tags
- Magnet snaps to replace pant zippers and shirt buttons
- Side entry zipper on pants
- Shirt openings for abdominal tubes
- Jackets and fleeces that connect with Velcro or magnets at the back for wheelchair users

[EzSox](#): Socks and underwear adapted with loops to promote independence.

## Assistive Devices for Fasteners:

- Zipper loops with a keychain ring or other built up tab to grasp to pull
- Button hook
- Adapted Shoe Laces Options: [Quick Snap Laces](#), [Snap Laces](#), [HICKIES](#), [Greeper Laces](#), [EZ Laces](#), [Easy Laces](#), [Zu Bits](#)

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