



# Dressing Techniques

After a spinal cord injury, daily activities like dressing can be hard. Certain tricks can help you do more by yourself. Some clothes are easy to put on while others are more difficult. Using adapted devices or adapting your current clothing can help. Using the right techniques and positions can make it much easier for you to dress.

### Using the Right Clothing

**Loose clothing:** Loose fitting clothes are easier to put on. This is more important if you get swelling or use a brace.

**Buttons and zippers:** Buttons and zippers can be difficult to use when you have weak hands. Button hooks and finger loops on zippers can make things easier. Another option is to modify shirts and pants to use Velcro instead.



**Lower body:** Using a reacher or clothing hook can help you dress your lower body. For some occasions, consider wearing tear-away pants as they are easy to put on. Skirts can also be easier to put on than pants.



**Upper body:** Try wearing looser clothing on your upper body. Avoid shirts with tight necks since they are more difficult to pull on. Bras which attach at the front (front-clasping) are easier to attach.

**Feet:** After spinal cord injury, it is common for your feet to swell. You might need larger shoes to fit the swelling. A long-handled shoe horn can help you get your shoes on. Using a Sock Aid can also make it easier for you to put on socks.



### Dressing Tips

When dressing, it is easiest to start with your weaker side. Dressing can be easier by having the right posture. Using pillows, blankets and towels can help you get the right position. Adding straps or a bedrail can also help you roll and lift your legs in bed. Using a reacher or dressing stick can also be helpful.

**Contact your Occupational Therapist for more information.**

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Use a long handled mirror to check your skin when dressing. Red spots can be a sign of a pressure injury. For more about this, check out the Spinal Cord Essentials [Pressure Injury Prevention](#) handout.

### Dressing your lower body in bed

When dressing in bed, first get in a seated position. Do this by raising the head of your bed up or leaning against the headboard. You can also use pillows to help you get into position. Always slide your leg into a pant leg one at a time.

1. Start by crossing one leg over the other or place your legs in a “frog leg position” Bend your knee away from your body. Both of these positions bring your heels closer to your arms.
2. Roll or bunch each pant leg into a ring. Slip your foot into the pant leg. While working with each leg, put on your sock and shoe.
3. Slide the pant legs up a little.
4. Repeat the process for the other leg.
5. Roll side to side and pull your pants over your bum one side at a time.



### Dressing your lower body in a wheelchair

When dressing in your wheelchair, first apply your breaks. Make sure your front wheels are in a forward position.

1. To make it easier to put on, roll or bunch your pant legs into rings.
2. To put on your pants, you will need to elevate your foot a little. You can do this by crossing your legs at the knee or



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ankles. You can also put your foot in front of you on a soft chair or stool.

3. When putting your pants on, do one leg at a time. While your foot is up, also put on your sock and shoe.
4. Once your foot is in, bring the pant leg up to your knee.
5. To get the pants over your bum, lean to the side. It is safest to use a sturdy surface like a bed or table for support. After pulling up your pants on one side, lean to the other side and pull the pants over your bum.

### Upper body dressing

Put your shirt on one arm at a time. You can start either with your arm or with your head. If you have some weak hands, try the following tips:

- Bunch or roll sleeves into rings.
- Use your thumb to hook the shirt in the direction you want.
- Use your teeth to help hold your shirt.
- Increase your balance by using one arm to support your body.

Reduce how often you need to move the head of your bed up and down. This speeds up dressing and reduces skin irritation.