OSCE checklist for hair washing in bed

An OSCE checklist for hair washing in bed covers preparing the bed and equipment, protecting the bedding and the patient's eyes and ears, washing and rinsing gently, drying and leaving the patient comfortable.

OSCE checklist for hair washing in bed: steps to practise

1. Clean your hands, introduce yourself, confirm the patient's name and date of birth against the wristband, explain what you will do and gain consent. Ask about the patient's usual hair care and any cultural or religious preferences.
2. Check the care plan for neck or spinal problems, head injury, recent head or neck surgery, wounds or drains, and any allergy to shampoo. If any are present, ask the nurse in charge before you start.
3. Collect shampoo, jugs of warm water, a waterproof sheet, towels, a basin or shampoo tray, a bucket for waste water, cotton wool, a comb, gloves and an apron.
4. Close the curtains, raise the bed to a safe working height and apply the brakes.
5. Check the water temperature with a thermometer or on your own wrist, as your policy says, and ask the patient whether it feels comfortable.
6. Lower the pillow, place the waterproof sheet and tray under the head and neck, and support the neck without bending it far back.
7. Place cotton wool in the ears and give the patient a folded cloth to hold over the eyes.
8. Wet the hair, apply a small amount of shampoo, and massage the scalp gently with the pads of your fingers, not the nails.
9. Rinse with jugs of warm water until the water runs clear, keeping the water away from the face and ears.
10. Stop if the patient becomes dizzy, breathless or in pain, sit them up and get help.
11. Dry the hair with a towel, remove the cotton wool, and comb or style the hair the way the patient prefers.
12. Remove the wet equipment and linen, lower the bed and leave the patient comfortable and warm with the call bell in reach.

13. Remove gloves, clean your hands, record the care and report any scalp problem such as head lice, sores or broken skin.

What candidates commonly forget

- Not checking for neck injury or recent head surgery first
- Not testing the water temperature
- Letting water run into ears or eyes
- Not supporting the neck, or bending it too far back
- Leaving the patient with wet hair and a wet pillow
- Forgetting to check and report scalp problems

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy.

Practise the hands-on steps with a classmate or in a skills lab, because an AI patient cannot watch your technique. You can practise the talking part with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. Next, try A conversation about this morning's care. Back to the nursing foundation OSCE page: nursing foundation OSCE, or see the full OSCE checklist list.

Common questions

What is the OSCE checklist for hair washing in bed?

Confirm identity and consent, check for neck or head problems, prepare the equipment, test water temperature, protect the bed, eyes and ears, wash and rinse gently, dry and comb, tidy up and record scalp findings.

How do I protect the bed while washing hair?

Use a waterproof sheet and a tray or basin that drains into a bucket, and change any wet linen afterwards.

Can I wash the hair of a patient who cannot sit up?

Yes, if there is no neck or spinal problem, the neck is supported and your policy allows it. If not, use a no-rinse shampoo cap or another method your ward uses.

Sources

- NMC: standards of proficiency for registered nurses
- NICE CG139: infection prevention and control

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.