

Information Sheet- Final Days



Patient/ Family/Whānau guide

Each person and whānau experiences death in their own unique way. These final days are a deeply personal time, and your loved one may show some of the following signs as they near the end of life:

Signs to Expect:

- Increased sleepiness
- Speaking to people who aren't there, or to deceased ancestors
- Talking about leaving or taking a trip or journey
- Withdrawing from people or saying very little
- Loss of appetite – eating and drinking less, or not at all
- Difficulty swallowing
- Confusion, restlessness, or agitation (e.g., wanting to get out of bed but being too weak, trouble recognising people)
- Moaning or other sounds
- Loss of control over bladder and bowel movements (incontinence)
- Gurgling or noisy breathing due to secretions in the back of the throat
- Changes in breathing – rapid or slow breathing, or long pauses followed by quick breaths
- Blurred vision
- Hearing loss, or sometimes, heightened hearing
- Changes in skin temperature and color – hands or feet may feel cool, skin may look patchy or darker, and it can turn blue around the nose, mouth, fingers, and toes

These are all common signs during the dying process. Remember, death is a natural process, and it will happen in its own time and way for each person.

When to Contact Hospice or the Health Care Team:

- If symptoms aren't responding to interventions or medications
- If the patient becomes more restless, anxious, or confused
- If there is increased distress with breathing
- If the patient experiences pain or discomfort
- If you need help from a social worker, counselor, or other team member

Things You Can Do to Help:

- Allow your loved one to sleep as much as they need.
- Include family/whānau members in the care.
- Moisten the patient's mouth with mouth swabs provided by the nurse.
- Turn the patient regularly for comfort. If position changes cause discomfort, give medication 30 minutes before to help ease the process.
- If the patient has a fever or feels hot, apply a cool cloth to their forehead.
- Give medications as prescribed to help with anxiety, restlessness, agitation, or noisy breathing.
- Write down anything your loved one says. These words may bring comfort later.

- Continue speaking clearly to your loved one, as hearing is often the last sense to go.
- Play their favorite music softly.
- This is a time for family/whānau to share stories and say goodbyes. Sometimes, telling them it's okay to "let go" can bring peace.
- Keep a soft light on if the patient seems scared by darkness or shadows.
- Encourage visitors to speak directly to the patient, letting them know who they are.
- Create an atmosphere where your loved one feels comfortable – fresh air, a fan, or a window open can help if they're having trouble breathing.
- Stay close, offer gentle touches, and provide familiar scents, like fresh flowers or essential oils, if they enjoy them.
- Respect their spiritual, cultural, or personal wishes around death and aftercare.
- Make sure the GP knows your loved one is nearing the end of life, especially before weekends or holidays. This ensures they can complete the death certificate when the time comes.

How to Know When Your Loved One Has Died:

- Breathing and movement stop
- They do not respond to your voice
- Their eyes may be open or closed, and their jaw will relax
- Their skin will feel cool and pale
- No heartbeat or pulse can be felt

What to Do After Death:

- Take some time to be with your loved one, allowing space for your thoughts and emotions.
- If you're alone, contact a relative or friend for support.
- You don't need to move the body immediately. Straighten the body and place a flat pillow under the head. Turn off heaters and keep the room cool.
- There is no need to call an ambulance or the police when death is expected.
- Make a note of the time of death.
- Call hospice and your GP to inform them. This can be done the next morning if death occurs overnight.
- Contact a funeral director to notify them of the death. They will guide you in making arrangements for burial or cremation, according to your loved one's wishes.

It's important to remember that everyone experiences the dying process differently. Some may pass quietly, while others show more visible signs. This can be a deeply emotional time, and having support from family, and friends can make a significant difference in providing comfort.

Please see the below link which has some helpful information for whanau and caregivers.

[Ending Life Well Podcast | Otago Community Hospice](#)

Kind acknowledgement to Otago Community Hospice for sharing this information