

Withdrawal from the world

The person may seem unresponsive and withdrawal from the world is often a gradual process. Eventually the person will lapse into a state of unconsciousness and may remain in this state for some time.

Most people at this stage do not rouse from sleep but die peacefully and comfortably. This can be a very painful time for relatives. You may have a lot of mixed emotions and feelings throughout this period, which the staff at the Hospice are willing to help you with.

Remember, that the staff are there to support and comfort you and help you work through this very painful time and to assist you with any worries and concerns you may have.



After Death Has Occurred

There will be an adequate amount of time made available for you to say goodbye.

We will respect any religious or cultural needs of your relative.

The staff will talk you through all the required documentation.

The hospice staff will normally contact a funeral director on your behalf.

Please remember that the staff feel privileged to be able to support and care for you.



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Coping with dying

Understanding the changes that occur before death

Coping with dying

You may find it easier to support each other if you know what may happen during this sad and challenging time.

There comes a point in most people's lives when death and dying are contemplated. Perhaps we must face our own death or that of someone close to us, but we don't know what to expect.

In order to reduce the anxiety which often comes from the unknown, this leaflet describes some typical features of the process of dying.

It anticipates questions you may want to ask and hopefully it will encourage you to seek further help and information.

Preparing for approaching death

Each person is unique, however, when a person enters the final stage of the dying process (which could be a matter of hours or possibly days, it's often very hard to know), certain physical changes occur. These physical changes are a normal, natural response and the most appropriate kinds of care given at this time are comfort enhancing measures.

Therefore, as you seek to prepare yourself as this event approaches, the members of your Hospice team want you to know what to expect

Not all these signs and symptoms will occur with every person, nor will they occur in this particular sequence.

Changes which occur before death

- Diminished need for food and drink
- Increase in sleeping
- Changes in breathing
- Cooling of the body
- Withdrawing from the world

Diminished need for food and drink

Initially, as weakness develops, the effort of eating and drinking may simply have become too much, and at this time help with feeding might be appreciated however, do not try to force food or drink into the person. If the person is able to swallow, fluids may be given in small amounts by syringe (ask the Hospice nurse for guidance). Moistened swabs may help keep the mouth moist and lip salve help to keep the person comfortable.

The person may develop a decrease in appetite and thirst, wanting little or no food or fluid. It can be difficult to accept when someone stops eating and drinking, even when we realise they are dying. Nevertheless there comes a time when food or drink are neither wanted nor needed. This can be very distressing for people who instinctively wish to nurture their loved one. However caring can be continued in other forms such as spending time together and caring for the person's physical comfort.

Changes in Breathing

The person's regular breathing pattern may change with the onset of a different pace when breathing may appear more laboured. A particular pattern consists of breathing irregularly, i.e., shallow breaths with periods of no breathing for prolonged periods. The person may also experience periods of rapid shallow pant-like breathing. These patterns are very common and indicate decrease in circulation in the internal organs. Remember this is distressing for you but not for the person dying.

The person may have gurgling sounds coming from his or her chest and these sounds may become very loud. This normal change is due to the decrease of fluid intake and an inability to cough up normal secretions. Gently repositioning may help and medications will be given to reduce this. However, these measures may have a limited success and although the noise may cause distress to the carers they don't appear to distress the dying person. The sound of the congestion does not indicate the onset of severe or new pain.

Coolness

The person's hands and arms, feet and then legs may be increasingly cool to the touch, and at the same time the colour of the skin may change. This is an indication that the circulation of blood is decreasing to the body's extremities.