

About your loved one's last days . . .



IH-IV-140
W.D. 3/99
Pg. 1 of 2

The death of a loved one can be very stressful for family and friends. The stress can be lessened if you understand some of the changes your loved one may go through when death is near. This pamphlet will tell you about these changes. They may begin to appear many days or hours before death. You may not see these changes all at the same time, or in the same order in which they are listed here. You may not see some of them at all.

Often, the best thing that you can do for a dying person is to be there with them. It is an important time for family and friends to gather. Share thoughts and feelings of love with the dying person. This may be a time of healing for some families.

Meeting spiritual needs is very important. Some patients and families are comforted by a visit from a member of their clergy during this time.

Talk to your loved one in a normal tone of voice. You do not need to whisper or change your style of talking. Remember that hearing is the last sense to be lost. Always assume you can be heard.

It is important that your loved one be as comfortable as possible. Let the doctor or nurse know if pain is a problem. Gently touching or caressing may be comforting also.

Your loved one may not be able to see as well as before, so you may want to keep the lights on in the room.

These are some of the changes you may see . . .

Sleeping more -

This is because the body is slowing down. Let your loved one sleep. Give any needed medicine when they wake up. Plan to spend time together when they are more alert.

Confusion -

Your loved one may seem more confused about time, people and where they are. They may also talk to people who are not in the room, or people who have already died. Comfort your loved one if they seem scared, but don't try to correct them. Someone who is dying may be restless and pull on the sheets.

(over)

Less thirst and hunger -

This is because the body is slowing down. Do not try to make them drink or eat. Try to keep their mouth moist for comfort. You can put Vaseline on your loved one's lips to keep them from being too dry. If the person can chew, you can give them chips of ice. Don't force any medicine, food or liquids into your loved one's mouth.

Less urine and bowel movements -

Your loved one may urinate (pee) less, or they may not be able to control their urine and bowel movements. You may need to put pads under them, and change them when needed to keep them clean and dry. **If your loved one feels a need to urinate (pee) and can't, call the nurse.**

Fluid in the mouth or throat -

Fluids may become thick in the mouth because the dying person is eating and drinking less. Sometimes, thick mucous in the throat will make a sound called 'the death rattle'. It may help to raise the person's head on pillows. You can wipe out their mouth with wet mouth sponges. Most often, nothing needs to be done.

Cold arms, legs and body -

Your loved one's body is not able to stay warm any longer. Arms, legs and feet may feel very cold and look blue in color. Lips may also look blue. The underside of the body may look much darker in color. At times, the dying person may even feel like they have a fever.

Breathing changes -

Breaths may not be as deep. There may be as much as thirty (30) seconds between breaths. This change may last awhile and it may come and go.

At the time of death . . .

- Breathing stops.
- The heart stops beating.
- You cannot wake the patient up.
- The person's eyes may be part way open.
- The mouth may drop open a little.
- The person may urinate (pee) or have a bowel movement.

**We are here for you and your loved one.
Let us know about any questions, concerns, or needs you have.**