

Caring for the dying person

When the person is close to dying, there will be things the family will need to do to help keep the person comfortable. It is important to maintain privacy and respect. Things that may help:

Environment/space

- Creating a comfortable space for family to visit.
- A single bed or even a hospital bed may be useful.
- Your family may have their own cultural or spiritual practices to do during this time.
- Consider music, soft lighting, an open window, and gentle touch as ways to show your love to the person.

Personal care/Eating/Drinking

- Swallowing may be difficult at this time. They will probably not want to eat or drink at this stage, which is normal. Do not force them to eat or drink.
- Offering small sips of water will help keep the person's mouth moist. Mouth swabs do help.
- A lip balm is good for keeping the lips moist.
- A bed sponge may be preferable.
- It is common for the amount of urine to decrease as the person is not drinking very much.
- Shaving and combing the hair is not necessary but is fine to do to maintain personal dignity.
- Absorbent pads or adult nappies may be helpful if they lose control of their bladder and/or bowels.

Medicines

- Some medicines will be stopped at this time and other medicines may be given in other ways - the Doctor or health worker will let you know.
- Sometimes the Doctor or health worker will ask you to get some additional medicine from the Pharmacy to keep at the house – this is so you will have immediate access to it should it be needed.

Common symptoms

- Pain - You may need to judge if the person is uncomfortable, rather than asking them as talking may be too difficult for them. A person who is in pain may make a facial grimace or frown, they may grunt or groan or whimper, they may appear agitated and move and shift position. Give medicines, following the instructions on the label, and let the Doctor or health worker know if the person continues to seem uncomfortable.
- Noisy Breathing - If the person's breathing changes such as becoming noisy, there are medicines available to help lessen the noise. Open a window or putting on a fan may help.
- Restlessness - Changing positions may help if they become restless. Using pillows to help position and support a person remain on their side can be helpful and swapping sides every 2-4 hours.

- Confusion - Playing familiar music might help if they begin to call out or groan. Medicines are available and can be used if they become confused or agitated or distressed.
- As they become closer to dying the person may experience times where they lapse in and out of consciousness. You can still talk to them to let them know you are there.

It is important that you feel supported by family and by your doctor or health worker at this time and can call for assistance at any time.

