

## Knowing what might happen can help make this time less worrying for all concerned.

Each person is unique, but in many cases there are common signs that indicate a person may be dying.

Death usually comes gradually and peacefully. Signs of nearing death may or may not happen, nor will they happen in any particular order.

Most changes that occur at this time are normal and often don't need special treatment.

## Here are some of the changes that may occur:

### Not eating and drinking

There will come a time when food and drink are neither wanted nor needed as the body begins to shut down. Discuss with the nurse as caring may be continued in other ways such as moistening the mouth with a wet, cool swab, or ice chips. Use water or the person's preferred fluid such as iced tea etc. Applying lip balm may avoid dry lips.

### Change in awareness

As weakness increases, the person may spend more time in bed and have less interest in their

surroundings. From a very sleepy state, they may lapse into unconsciousness. This may last for a very short time, or for several days.

### Increased confusion and restlessness

You may notice signs such as: groaning, calling out, pulling at bedclothes, twitching or trying to get out of bed when they are too weak to stand, and/or muddled thinking and conversations. Your nurses will check that there are not any other factors causing the restlessness, such as a full bladder. You can reassure the person by talking calmly, saying who you are and holding their hand (if appropriate). Playing some familiar music, having a familiar item such as a special blanket or bed socks may help. Sometimes medication may be needed to calm and soothe the restlessness.

If the dying person is seeing someone from the past, (that is not visible to you) and are not distressed, this may be a normal sign for the dying person.

### Breathing

It is very common for the breathing patterns to change. There may be periods of rapid shallow breathing

with gaps of seconds or minutes between breaths. This does not usually cause distress to the dying person.

### Noisy, rattily, gurgling breathing

Occasionally there can be a noisy rattle to the breathing due to a **small** amount of saliva near the air passages. This is not usually distressing for the person who is dying, but it might be for you. A change of position and/or medication may help.

### Incontinence

Sometimes there is a loss of control of bowel and bladder. Regular checks are done to ensure the person is clean and dry. Occasionally the use of pads or an indwelling catheter may be helpful for comfort reasons.

### Other

#### Skin changing colour/temperature;

You may notice the person's arms, hands, legs, feet, nose and ears feel cool and possibly look patchy or dark in colour. These are signs that the body is slowing down.

#### Jaw relaxes and mouth stays open;

Mouth and tongue may become dry due to mouth breathing. Moistening the mouth is helpful. (see – Not eating and drinking)

## What do you do when someone has died?

You don't have to do anything straight away. Take your time and collect your thoughts. When you are ready, contact your nurse.

The nurse will contact the doctor.

The staff may reposition the person on their back, and close their eyes if they are open. It may not always be possible to close the eyes and mouth at this moment. The funeral directors will assist with this.

You may want family/whānau or friends to be with you for support and to say goodbye to the person who has died. If you choose, you, or the nurse can contact your spiritual/cultural support person.

When you are ready, the staff will wash and dress the person.

If you would like to stay and help with this, you are very welcome. If you have any special items of clothing you wish them to wear, you are more than welcome to ask your nurse to use these.

The nurse will guide you when it is time to contact the Funeral Director and they will help you

make arrangements. If you haven't chosen a Funeral Director yet, seek advice from friends and family/whānau or you may choose one from FDANZ - Funeral Directors Association New Zealand. <http://www.fdanz.org/>

The staff will help you with any other arrangements that need to be made before you leave.

**Although one journey may be finishing, the journey for you will continue.**

As you face your loss there will be a range of supports available to you.

Your GP will be the best person to approach in the first instance to put you in contact with the appropriate support available to you in your area.

Services that have been involved during the person's illness may also offer bereavement support.



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## What to expect when someone is dying

This may be used in conjunction with the Last days of Life – Care Plan.



**If you are unsure or concerned about anything, please call the nurse supporting you.**