

FACILITIES

If your relative or friend is in hospital you should be given information about visiting, car parking and how to obtain drinks and meals. Some hospital car parks operate a pay and display system, so if you are spending a lot of time visiting the ward the staff can assist you in obtaining a dispensation ticket.

If your relative or friend is in Rowcroft Hospice, please refer to the Rowcroft Hospice Inpatient Unit Booklet.

SPIRITUAL / RELIGIOUS NEEDS

You should be asked if you or your relative or friend have a specific religious, spiritual or cultural beliefs as you may wish to obtain comfort and support from a chaplain or cultural advisor. The staff caring for your relative or friend can also help you to contact your own community chaplain or cultural advisor if you wish.

Please tell those helping to care for your relative if there are any specific personal, faith or cultural traditions that are important to observe before, at the time of, or after death. They may be able to help facilitate this as they would not wish to cause you any added distress.

INFORMATION

The healthcare team will be assessing your relative or friend regularly and want to make sure you have the information you need about their care and are aware of how to obtain further information if or when you feel you need it. Please discuss with staff members any concerns or questions you have about what may happen before or immediately after your friend or relative dies.

It is natural to forget some of what you are told and the staff will be happy to answer any questions or arrange for a more appropriate member of the team to speak with you.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Further support and advice is also available from the Specialist Palliative Care Team should this be necessary.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/planners/end-of-life-care

Rowcroft Hospice

www.rowcrofthospice.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 282723

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Adapted from a leaflet by Marie Curie Cancer Care



Coping with Dying

Understanding the changes that happen when someone is reaching the last days of their life



This leaflet is to help you know what to expect when a relative or friend is thought to be in the last hours or days of their life. Please feel free to ask questions or request help at any time.

Often what is important at this point is spending time together and letting the person know you are there and care about them. Talking about special memories or holding their hand can be of comfort.

As someone nears the end of their life they usually spend more time sleeping and will often be drowsy when awake. You should not be discouraged if your relative or friend is unable to respond to you as they may still know you are there.

REDUCED NEED FOR FOOD AND DRINK

Being able to eat and drink is part of our usual day to day life. Lack of interest in food and drink is a normal part of the dying process and a physical sign that the person we care for is not going to recover from their illness. Knowing someone is near the end of their life and that they no longer want to eat or drink can be hard to understand.

As someone grows weaker the effort needed to eat and drink may become too much for them so help may be needed. Food and drink will continue to be offered to someone who is dying until they lose their natural ability to swallow. It may not be helpful in this situation to continue or start fluids through a drip and may add to someone's physical discomfort.

When a person becomes unable to swallow it can be distressing so keeping the person's mouth moist and clean is helpful at this time. This can be done by moistening the mouth and applying lip balm. The nursing staff would be happy to show you how to help with this if you wish.

CHANGES IN BREATHING AND OTHER SIGNS

As someone nears the end of their life their breathing often becomes uneven and may sound laboured. Occasionally there may be a noisy rattle with each breath. This is due to fluid in the airways which cannot be coughed up.

As people are usually more drowsy at this stage this can often be more distressing for relatives and friends than for the person themselves.

Medication may be used to reduce the noise and changing position in bed may also help. The emphasis at this time is on ensuring that your relative or friend is not distressed by the changes in their breathing through the use of medication and reassurance.

As someone's condition changes, their skin may feel cold and possibly moist. Sometimes their skin may change colour and become slightly blue or white. This is normal and due to changes in their blood circulation.

In the last hours or days of life some people can appear restless. This is quite common; reassurance and medication can be used to reduce any distress this may cause.

MEDICATION

Not all medicines are helpful during the last stage of someone's life; the main aim at this time is comfort. The staff caring for your relative or friend may therefore suggest changes to their usual medicines.