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'Til Death Do Us Part



When Someone You Love is Dying

Is your loved one dying? Are you looking for ways to prepare yourself for this event?

The goal of this pamphlet is to help you with the challenges that you will be facing. While you may have mixed feelings about reading this pamphlet, please know that it was designed to help you learn about what to expect. Your wellbeing matters just as much as the wellbeing of your dying loved one. Please know that not every dying person will show all of the signs described in this pamphlet. If you have questions or concerns about the care of your loved one, please discuss these with your doctor or nurse.

What Happens At the End of Life and What You Can Do To Help

Sleeping: Your loved one may spend more time sleeping. They may not wake up as easily or talk as much as they used to. This is normal. It happens because of changes in the body's metabolism.

Help By: Sit with your loved one. Hold his or her hand, but don't shake it or speak loudly. Speak softly and in a way that feels right for you. Spend time with your loved one when he or she is more alert or awake. Don't talk about your loved one like he or she is not in the room. You should speak

directly to your loved one even if he or she does not respond to you. Hearing is the last sense to be lost, so your loved one may be able to hear you even if they are not alert or awake.

Confusion: Your loved one may be confused about the time, place, and people around them. They may not recognize people that they know, such as family or friends. This happens because of changes in the body's metabolism.

Help By: Tell your loved one who you are before you speak to them. Don't ask them to guess who you are. Speak softly and clearly.

Restlessness: Your loved one may make restless movements and repeat them over and over. For instance, they may pull at blankets, sheets, or clothing. This happens because your loved one's brain is not getting as much oxygen as it used to.

Help By: Don't try to stop your loved one from making these movements. Speak softly and in a way that feels right for you. Lightly rub your loved one's forehead, read to them, or play soothing music.

Eating and Drinking: Your loved one may not want to eat or drink. This is a normal part of the dying process.

Help By: Do not try to force your loved one to eat or drink. You can offer your loved one some ice chips or a few bites of a food that they enjoy.

Coolness: Your loved one's hands, arms, feet, and legs may seem colder than they used to be. Their face may be pale, and their feet and legs may look purple or blue. This happens because blood is being used by

your loved one's vital organs instead of being sent to their limbs.

Help By: Keep your loved one warm with blankets. Don't use electric blankets.

Incontinence (Loss of Bladder and Bowel Control): Your loved one may lose bladder and bowel control. This happens because the muscles are starting to relax. The closer your loved one gets to death, the more likely it is that they will lose bladder and bowel control.

Help By: Ask the nurse about padding to protect the bed and keep your loved one dry. Ask the nurse about other products that can increase your loved one's comfort.

Congestion: You may hear loud gurgling sounds coming from your loved one's throat or chest. This happens because your loved one is not as able to swallow his or her saliva (spit). It does not mean that your loved one is uncomfortable.

Help By: Do not try to suction your loved one's mouth. This may cause pain. Turn your loved one's head to the side so that the saliva can drain. You can wipe your loved one's mouth with a moist cloth.

Breathing: Your loved one may not breathe the same way that he or she used to. Breaths may be rapid, shallow, or sound like panting. Your loved one may stop breathing for 10 to 30 seconds at a time. After your loved one dies, there may be a "last sigh" or a gurgling sound. This happens because there is less blood flow to your loved one's organs.

Help By: You can raise the head of the bed or turn your loved one to the side. Hold your loved one's hand and speak softly.

Decreased Urine: Your loved one may not produce as much urine (pee). Their urine may be darker or tea colored. This happens because they are not drinking as much fluid and because less blood is flowing to their kidneys.

Help By: Ask the nurse if anything needs to be done.

Withdrawal: Your loved one may not be able to respond to you at all. This happens because your loved one's body is letting go.

Help By: Since hearing is the last sense to be lost, you can still talk to your loved one. Speak softly and in a way that feels right for you. Hold your loved one's hand, tell them who you are, and say things that will help them to let go.

Vision: Your loved one may see places or people that you cannot see. They may tell you that they have spoken to someone who is already dead. This is not a hallucination and is not caused by the drugs that your loved one is being given. Your loved one is getting ready for death so that he or she will not be afraid.

Help By: Accept what your loved one is saying. Don't argue with him or her or try to explain away what they are seeing. The things that your loved one is seeing are very real to him or her. This is a normal part of dying.

Decreased Socialization: Your loved one may want to be with just a few or only one person. This is a sign that your loved one is

getting ready to let go. If your loved one does not want to spend as much or any time with you, this does not mean that they don't love you. It means that you have done all that you can for your loved one. It is time to say goodbye.

How You Will Know When Your Loved One Has Died

- Your loved one will not respond in any way
- He or she will not be breathing
- His or her pulse and heartbeat will stop
- Your loved one's eyes will not move. They may be open or closed.
- Your loved one may lose bladder or bowel control

What To Do After Your Loved One Has Died: Please know that there is no right or wrong way to be at this time. Do what feels right for you and not what you feel others may expect of you.

Help By: You may want to spend time with your loved one. Take as much time as you need. Some people want to stay with their loved one for hours, and some do not want to stay at all. Feel free to touch, hug, or kiss your loved one. Some people wish to lie down next to their loved one. All of these things are normal. Your needs may not be the same as the needs of others. Please be sensitive and respect others' concerns.

Crying: Some people see crying as a normal response to grief. Others keep their feelings inside and may not be able to cry. This

doesn't mean that one person is grieving more than another. Both reactions are normal.

Prayer: Some people feel the need to pray and some do not. Do what feels right for you.

Cultural Rituals: There may be special things that you need to do as a part of your culture.

Spirituality: This is very important for some people and less important for others. If you need to talk to a spiritual advisor, feel free to do so.

Bereavement Issues: If you need help at this time, please talk to your spiritual advisor, social worker, doctor, or nurse. They can help you find what you need.



Caring For Yourself

Seeing your loved one dying can absorb all of your energy. If the process is a long one, your body and mind can become very tired. Please know that your wellbeing matters just as much as the wellbeing of your dying loved one. Taking care of yourself is one of the best things that you can do for your loved one. Both you and your dying loved one may feel frustration, guilt, sadness, and

anger. These feelings are common and normal. They happen because you and your loved one are both dealing with many losses.

Help By: Make sure that you are taking care of yourself and your own needs.

Rest: You may have trouble sleeping, but your body needs rest. Try to sleep when you can.