

## How do I know that death is near?

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Approaching death can be a difficult time. Everyone is different. Not all the signs of approaching death are the same for everyone.

**Please keep in mind that your loved one may only have some of these signs and there is no specific order to when they happen:**

### **Sleeping**

There is an increased amount of time sleeping. There may be difficulty waking the person up and your loved one may be talking less or less responsive when you speak to them. This change is normal and is caused by changes in the body's chemical make-up.

- ✓ Plan to spend time with your loved one when he/she is most alert. Keep in mind that hearing remains until the moment of passing. Talk with your loved one, even if he/she is not responsive in return.

### **Confusion**

There may be more confusion about the time, place or the names of people. Your loved one may be seeing or hearing things that you cannot. This is normal and is caused by changes in the body's chemical make-up.

- ✓ Talk with staff for ways to help manage the confusion.
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**Restlessness, anxiety and agitation**

There may be restlessness and making movements such as pulling at bed linen, objects or clothing; or becoming anxious or agitated. This may be due to medical issues, pain, or the fear of death and the unknown.

- ✓ Speak slowly and quietly with your loved one, with reassurance.
- ✓ Talk with staff about how to manage restlessness.

**Reduced food and fluid intake**

As the body begins to shutdown, there is less or no desire for food and fluids.

- ✓ Keep lips and mouth moist for comfort.
- ✓ Ask staff about what food or drink may be offered.

**Changes in skin**

The arms, hands, legs and feet may become cool to touch. Skin may be pale or turn a purple-blue mottled colour. This is because the circulation of blood is decreasing to reserve blood for the most important organs. Even though skin may be cool, your loved one is usually comfortable.

- ✓ Touch can be good for you and your loved one.

**Elimination**

The amount of urine and stool decreases. Urine may become darker. This is due to the kidneys shutting down. There is a loss of control of the bladder and bowels as the muscles in these areas begin to relax.

- ✓ Talk with staff about ways to keep your loved one clean and dry.
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## **Breathing**

There may be gurgling sounds or “congestion” coming from the throat or chest. This is normal and is due to not swallowing well.

- ✓ Keep your loved one on his/her side if possible.
- ✓ Talk with staff about how else to manage this symptom.

There may be periods of fast and shallow breathing. Breathing becomes irregular, and may stop for 10 to 30 seconds. Breathing difficulties may be due to food or fluid going into the lungs, lung infections or heart failure.

## **Social withdrawal**

There may be no response, the person may withdraw or go into a coma-like state. Your loved one may only want to visit with a few people, or only with one person. If this happens to you it is not because you are not important or loved. It may mean that it is time to say good bye.

- ✓ Talk with staff, if you wish, about your feelings at this time.

## **When will my loved one die?**

It is not easy to know exactly when someone will die. As the end-of-life draws closer it becomes more difficult to know when death will happen. Some people will slowly show the signs of approaching death before they die. Others will show signs of death but then will perk up or become stronger for periods of time before dying. Everyone is different.

## What happens when death occurs?

The heart stops beating and breathing stops. Pupils become fixed and large. The body may also become cold and rigid. Your doctor or nurse will confirm the death.

Please tell the nurses ahead of time how you would like to be informed if you are not present when your loved one dies. Let us know who you would like us to call and when, such as call anytime or not at night.



We will do our best to respect and honour your religion, culture and rituals.

Family and loved ones may wish to come and view the body before transfer to the funeral home.

You may take your time to say good-bye.

## Resources

There are bereavement resources available in the community. Please ask the social worker for information.