

Final Days

Everyone is different, and they may show different signs near the end of life. But there are some common signs that many people experience in their last days.

Signs a person is near death

As death gets closer, a person might:

- Sleep a lot more than usual
- Talk to people who aren't there
- Talk about leaving, going on a trip, or starting a journey
- Eat or drink less
- Have trouble swallowing
- Become confused or disoriented
- Moan or make other sounds
- Lose control of their bladder or bowels
- Have trouble breathing, or make wet breathing sounds
- Have moments when they stop breathing, then take several deep breaths
- Have blurred vision or trouble seeing
- Have difficulty hearing
- Need less pain medicine or feel less pain
- Have cold hands or feet
- Show blue or purple coloring around the nose, mouth, fingers, or toes

What can you do to help during the final days?

- Let the person sleep as much as they want.
- Include children in a way that fits their age and how much they want to be involved.
- Help the person move if it makes them more comfortable.
- Keep the person's lips and mouth moist with a small sponge or washcloth.
- If the person has a fever or feels hot, put a cool cloth on their forehead.
- Give the person medicine as directed to help with things like anxiety, pain, or difficulty breathing.
- Write down or record what the person says, as it might comfort you later.
- Keep talking to the person and say the things you need or want to say. Even if they can't respond they might still be able to hear you.
- Keep a light on in the room to make them feel comforted.
- Play the person's favorite music softly.
- Ask visitors to say who they are when they speak.
- Keep the room calm and peaceful.
- Open a window or use a fan if the person has trouble breathing.
- Stay close to the person and continue to touch them for comfort.

What should you tell your care team?

If you're caring for someone near the end of life, it's important to let your care team know about any changes.

You should report:

- Any signs of anxiety or worry
- Changes in how they are breathing
- Pain or discomfort

PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION

- A need for spiritual support
- Emotional or social concerns, like feelings of sadness or grief
- Important cultural or religious traditions
- Contact information for the funeral home
- Any special concerns the patient may have

Talk to the care team if you have any questions. It's important for caregivers to take care of themselves while helping the person who is dying. The team will be there to help and support you.

Other helpful resources

Dehydration in the Final Days

Facing Hard Choices: A Guide to Artificial Nutrition and Hydration

Final Days

Hard Choices for Loving People

Hospice Training for Caregivers and Families Video: Signs of Changes

Hospice Training for Caregivers and Families Video: Final Moments

Self-care for the Caregiver

When the Time Comes