

End-of-Life Care

End-of-life care focuses on relief of physical symptoms and emotional stress. Ensuring a loved one's final months, weeks and days of life are as comfortable as they can be requires care choices. Anticipating the demands of end-of-life caregiving can help you manage some common changes.

Common Changes	What To Do
Drowsiness	Your loved one may want to sleep a lot. Plan visits or activities when he/she is most rested and keep visits and activities short.
Loss of appetite/ swallowing changes	Your loved one may experience decreased desire for food and/or fluids, and swallowing may become difficult (you may notice your loved one coughing after swallowing). Allow your loved one to choose what he/she wishes to eat and try offering small amounts of soft foods at frequent intervals. They may not want to eat or drink, and that is normal. Dehydration is a natural process at end of life and the changes in body chemistry can promote patient comfort. Mouth swabs may be used to keep the mouth clean and comfortable.
Bladder and bowel control	Your loved one may experience loss of bladder and bowel control. Adult briefs can help with this change.
Skin changes	Keeping the skin dry is important to prevent skin issues. Turning and repositioning frequently and using barrier creams on the skin can help prevent skin breakdown. Your nurse can demonstrate how to turn and reposition your loved one.
Confusion/ restlessness	Your loved one may become confused, and you may notice changes in his/her thinking pattern. You may notice increased restlessness. It is important to keep your loved one safe. You may need to supervise or take over administration of medications and other care tasks. Talk to your nurse about safety concerns.
Agitation	Agitation is a sudden, distressing state of intense restlessness. Symptoms also include a short attention span and an inability to think clearly. It is important to reduce noise and keep the environment calm. It can be helpful to reorient him or her by reminding them where they are and you are there to help. Call your nurse to help manage agitation.
Unresponsiveness	In time, your loved one will become unresponsive and will no longer be able to talk to you; however, he or she may still be able to hear you. Spend time with your loved one and speak softly to them.
Breathing changes	Your loved one's breathing may change. Breaths often become shallow and irregular, and noisy breathing may occur. Turn your loved one to the side and place pillows under the head and at the back to support them on their side. Your nurse or aide can demonstrate how to position your loved one to help with breathing.
Death	In time, breathing will cease. When you are ready, call the hospice nurse. The nurse will come to your home and provide support. The hospice nurse is also able to assist you and your family to call the funeral home and provide end of life physical care for your loved one.

Call Empath Health with any questions (888) 855-2838:

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