

## What To Do

- Talk to your Palliative Care Team about where your loved one wishes to die.
- Choose a funeral home.
- Make the funeral plans with your loved one and with other family members.

## At the Time of Death

- There will be no pulse.
- There will be no breathing.
- Eyes may be open or closed and fixed in one position.
- There may be loss of bladder or bowel control.

## When Death Occurs At Home

- **DO NOT call 911.**
- **DO** call your Home Care Nurse or Family Physician to pronounce death.
- **DO** call family members, friends or spiritual advisor if you would like someone to be with you.
- **DO** call the Funeral Home after the Physician/Nurse has pronounced death.
- **DO** spend as much time as you wish with your loved one.

## After the Funeral Home Has Been Called

- Take time to say goodbye before your loved one is taken to the funeral home.
- Funeral plans can be completed by appointment.
- Take unused medications to your Pharmacist for disposal.
- Discuss with your Home Care Nurse the process for return of supplies and equipment.

## Telephone Numbers

Home Care: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Family Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Funeral Home: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Adapted from: *Preparing for Death: A Guide for Caregivers*  
Victoria Hospice Society, BC, Canada (2018)  
[www.victoriahospice.org](http://www.victoriahospice.org)



[saskhealthauthority.ca](http://saskhealthauthority.ca)

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[www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/palliative-care](http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/palliative-care)

# What to Expect as Life is Ending

Information for families and caregivers



"Green Skies and Purple Seas Sunset"

courtesy of Gina De Gorna

## Palliative Care Services



Saskatchewan  
Health Authority

## As Life Comes to and End

As life comes to an end, you should be aware that your loved one will go through different physical changes as the body slows down and prepares for the final stages of life. We hope you will find the included information helpful.

Please remember each situation is different. These signs and symptoms will not necessarily occur in all dying persons.

**When someone is dying you may notice that they may:**

### ***Sleep Longer***

They may sleep for longer periods and sometimes be difficult to wake up.

You should:

- Plan conversation for a time when they are more alert.
- Keep visiting times brief or encourage visitors to sit quietly at the bedside.
- You do not have to talk. Your quiet presence can be very comforting.
- Avoid over-tiring the person. Limit the number and length of visits.

### ***Eat and Drink Less***

They will have a decrease in appetite and ability to swallow.

- Small servings are more appealing.
- Keep the lips moist with a damp cloth, sponge or frequent sips of water.

### ***Have Difficulty Swallowing***

Difficulty or “forgetting” to swallow is common.

- Remind them to swallow.
- Forcing to eat or drink may cause vomiting or choking.

### ***Become Confused***

They may become confused and unable to recognize familiar people or surroundings.

- Speak calmly and naturally
- Give gentle reminders about the time, where they are and who is in the room.

### ***Become Restless***

They may become restless and pull at the bed linen and clothing, or may “see” things.

- Give reassurance. Avoid physical restraints if possible. Hold their hand.
- Calm, soothing music or gentle massage may ease restlessness.

### ***Be Unresponsive***

They may not respond to voices or touch and may be in a coma or sleeping with eyes open.

- Physical touch, such as holding hands, may be a good way to connect.
- Continue to speak in a calm, natural way. Messages of love and support can be heard.



### ***Develop Wet-Sounding Breathing***

This may be caused by saliva collecting at the back of the throat which cannot be swallowed because of weak muscles.

- Turn patient to their side.
- Raise the head of the bed or raise upper body with pillows.
- Suctioning is usually ineffective in clearing secretions.

### ***Have Irregular Pulse or Heartbeat***

Both of these are normal patterns and are signs of the “slowing down” process.

### ***Lose Control of Bladder or Bowels***

Your Nurse can give advice on protective coverings for beds or recommend whether a catheter may be helpful.

### ***Have Cool Limbs***

The arms and legs may feel cool to touch with the skin acquiring a blue/purple mottled appearance. They may perspire or feel cool and clammy. Slowing of circulation causes these changes. Cover the patient as usual as they will not be feeling cold.

### ***Have Irregular or Shallow Breathing***

It is common to have 10-30 second periods when breathing may stop. Gaspings sounds are common.