

What Can Happen When Someone is Dying:

Information for Relatives or Friends



If you would like this information in an accessible format such as large print, braille, audio format or in a community language please telephone: 0141 201 4915 or Email: perl@ggc.scot.nhs.uk

إذا كنتم تحتاجون إلى هذه المعلومات في تنسيقٍ يسهل الاطلاع عليه، كأن تُطبع بأحرف كبيرة أو تُكتب بطريقة بريل أو تُترجم إلى إحدى اللغات المحلية، يُرجى استخدام بيانات الاتصال المذكورة في نشرة المعلومات المريض أو الخطاب المرسل لكم.

如果您需要便于使用的信息版本，例如大号字体版本或盲文版或社区语言版本，请使用您的患者信息单或信函上的联系信息索取相应版本。

اگر این اطلاعات را در قالبی مناسبتر همچون چاپ درشت یا خط بریل یا زبانی خاص نیاز دارید، لطفاً با استفاده از اطلاعات تماس درج شده بر روی بروشور یا نامه بیمار خود، با ما تماس بگیرید.

Aby uzyskać te informacje w przystępnym formacie, np. w druku powiększonym, alfabecie Braille'a lub w języku wspólnoty, prosimy o kontakt pod adresem podanym w liście lub na ulotce informacyjnej dla pacjenta.

Dacă aveți nevoie de aceste informații într-un format accesibil, cum ar fi caractere mărite, scriere braille sau într-o limbă comunitară, vă rugăm să utilizați datele de contact din scrisoarea sau prospectul informativ pentru pacient.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی قابل رسائی فارمیٹ، جیسے بڑے حروف یا بریل یا کسی کمیونٹی زبان میں درکار ہے، تو براہ کرم آپ اپنے مریض سے متعلق معلوماتی پرچے یا خط پر دی گئی رابطے کی تفصیلات استعمال کریں۔

The doctors and nurses believe that your relative or friend is now dying. We understand that this can be a sad and difficult time. Our main priorities are making them as comfortable as possible, maintaining their dignity and supporting you.

Staff will discuss with you any decisions about your relative or friend's care to make sure that you understand the reason(s) for these. The nurses or doctors will also speak to you about what is important and what matters to your relative or friend. They will regularly review your relative or friend's condition and if necessary make any changes to keep them comfortable.

If you would like to be more involved in your relative or friend's care for example helping with washing or mouth care please let staff know.

Please do not hesitate to ask us if you have any questions or concerns.

Nearing the end of life

This leaflet may help you understand some of the changes that can happen when a person is dying.

When someone is dying certain changes within the body can happen. Although these changes can be difficult, they are a natural part of the body preparing itself for death as the different body systems slow down. If you have any questions or concerns about these changes please speak to us.

It can be difficult to predict when someone will die as some people die very quickly without much warning, while others slowly deteriorate over days or weeks. Everyone is different.

However as death approaches the following may occur:

- Loss of appetite, difficulty swallowing and taking medication
- Extreme tiredness and weakness
- Changes in breathing pattern e.g. noisy breathing or shallow breathing
- Changes in body temperature and skin colour
- Confusion and, or, agitation

Loss of appetite, difficulty swallowing and taking medication

Your relative or friend may no longer need, or want to eat or drink. At this time mouth care is very important. Therefore, we will give your relative or friend regular mouth care to keep their mouth moist and comfortable.

If your relative or friend can still eat and drink safely, this can continue for as long as possible. If you have any concerns about their ability to swallow please speak to their nurse or doctor.

They may no longer be able to take medicines by mouth. The doctors will review which medicines they still need and may stop others.

They may also prescribe medications to aid comfort if needed. If your relative or friend is finding it hard to swallow, they may receive their medication through a fine needle placed just under the skin. This will avoid repeated injections. Sometimes medicines may need to be given continuously over the day, if this is required this will be explained and discussed with you.

Extreme tiredness and weakness

As time passes your relative or friend is likely to sleep much more and, when awake, less able to talk to you. They may seem unconscious for hours or even days at a time. We believe that although people who are dying may not speak they may still be able to hear. Please speak to your relative or friend as though they can hear. You may wish to comfort them by holding their hand.

Changes in breathing pattern

You may notice changes in your relative or friend's breathing. It could be slower, shallow or slightly quicker. As people approach the end of life the body is less active and the need for oxygen may be less.

Sometimes breathing can be noisy. This is often due to a collection of normal secretions in the chest and throat that your relative or friend is too weak to clear by coughing. These noisy secretions can be upsetting to hear, but your relative or friend will often not be aware of, or distressed by these. Sometimes changing their position can help or we may give them medication.

Changes in body temperature and skin colour

You may notice that your relative or friend's body temperature changes, sometimes they may appear flushed or cool. Their hands and feet may feel cold, or their skin may feel moist.

Their skin may appear to have colour changes, it may be pale or discoloured.

These changes are all normal.

Confusion and, or agitation

You may find that your relative or friend becomes confused and, or agitated which can be distressing. Sometimes just being present in the room or holding their hand can help.

There can be many reasons for this confusion and, or agitation. The staff will check if there is a reason for this, for example, pain, restlessness, needing a change of position or to pass urine and take appropriate action.

Support for you

All these physical changes can be difficult for you to watch and cope with and we understand that this may be a sad and upsetting time. If you are concerned about anything please speak to the nurse or doctor.

As death approaches you may become anxious or scared, or even experience a sense of relief. Everyone is different. Talking to someone about your thoughts and feelings and the concerns you have can often help.

Please don't let any concerns about saying or doing the wrong thing, keep you away from your relative or friend at this time. Often saying nothing and simply being present is enough. If you feel you cannot be present, for any reason, then this is okay.

Saying goodbye is very difficult and can be done in different ways. Some people find it helpful to say the things they need to say to their relative or friend. Other people may not feel the need to say anything at all. If the death happens when you are not there, which is possible, it is good to know that you had said goodbye - and anything else you wanted to say - in the way you wanted to.

You may feel it is important for you or someone else to be present at all times, but please remember it is also important to take breaks, eat and drink, and to try and sleep.

During this time, you may wish to contact a representative from your faith or belief community for support. They are simply concerned to see how you are coping and will be glad to listen to you, hear stories about your relative or friend, and give you support. In hospitals or hospices, the Chaplaincy Service can also assist with the above and any needs relating to faith or belief.

Organ or tissue donation

When someone dies it is now normal practice to consider tissue and organ donation. In some circumstances a member of staff may ask you about this.

If you know that your relative or friend has expressed a wish to be an organ or tissue donor, or is on the Organ Donor Register, please let us know so that we can contact a Tissue Donor Coordinator who will discuss this with you.

Further support

Following the death of your relative or friend the nurse or doctor will offer you a copy of the NHS Scotland “When someone has died – information for you” booklet. This booklet may help you through the first few days. When someone close to you dies, you may be unsure what to do. This booklet explains what you may need to do next, and how you may feel.

Notes Pages

You may want to use this space to write down important names and numbers, or questions you may want to ask.

Important Questions to ask

Contact Details – Names and Telephone Numbers

This leaflet 'What can Happen When Someone is Dying' – Information for Relatives and Carers has been written by staff and public representatives from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.