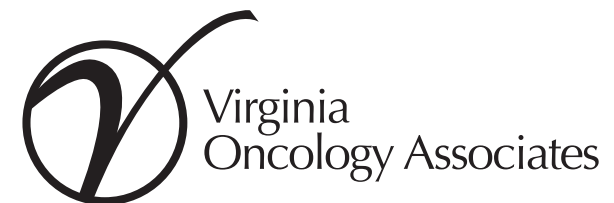


 United in Healing with
The US Oncology Network

WHAT TO EXPECT AT END OF LIFE



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This pamphlet serves as a guide as to what to expect as a person nears the end of life. This is not set in stone and each individual's passing is unique.

SYMPTOMS TO EXPECT

Withdrawal from the world and family

A person may begin to withdraw from their surrounding world once he or she acknowledges that he or she is dying. This typically begins as people tend to focus inward during the last few weeks of life. There is a loss of interest in things he or she used to enjoy, such as television or visitors. The person will likely become less conversant; however, be mindful that the person can still hear, so we advocate for talking with them.

Food

As the body shuts down, it does not need nutrients and calories as it once did. It is the natural course of dying to stop eating. There is usually a gradual decrease in eating habits. The person should be allowed to eat or drink if he or she chooses to do so. Liquids and soft solids are typically preferred, but this will also diminish. This is typically the most difficult concept for families. However, feeding and hydration at the end of life can actually make the person feel more uncomfortable and experience unwanted symptoms, such as nausea.

Increased Sleeping and Decreased Awareness

As the body progresses naturally, the person will become sleepier. You will find that he or she may take more naps and will eventually sleep most of the day. The person will become less aware of their surroundings, more confused, or begin talking to loved ones who have died.

Pain

As the cancer progresses, it may be more difficult to control pain. We encourage giving pain medication regularly. Doses may be increased or decreased as needed. Some caregivers and patients worry that pain medications may hasten death, but studies have shown that there is no link between pain medication use and early death.

The Dying Process

One to two weeks prior to death, a person will become more disoriented. They may be talking to deceased people, picking at clothing, or speaking about places that are unknown to others.

Physical changes that may be seen are:

- Slower and more irregular breathing patterns
- Restlessness due to lack of oxygen in the blood
- Congestion in the lung
- Glassy look to eyes
- Purplish color to hands and feet as blood flow slows down
- Loss of bowel and/or bladder

Days or hours before death, there may be an intensification of the above symptoms. These are typical signs prior to death, but remember that death is unique to the individual and everyone has a plan. More importantly, know that symptoms experienced prior to death can be well managed so that the person is allowed to die peacefully and with dignity.

