

Changing colour/temperature

You may notice the person's arms and legs feel cool and possibly look patchy and dark in colour. These are signs that the body is beginning to shut down. This doesn't necessarily mean they are feeling cold but putting on an extra blanket will do no harm.

How will you know the person has died?

- Breathing has stopped
- No heartbeat present
- There is no response when you touch them or talk loudly
- Eyes are fixed on a certain spot, pupils are dilated (large), and the eyelids may be open.
- Jaw relaxes and mouth stays open.
- Possible loss of control of bladder and bowel movements.

You don't have to do anything straight away. Take your time to collect your thoughts. Ask a nurse for advice.

"We would like to thank Arohanui Hospice Palmerston North, for their willingness to share their resources".

Compassion

*"Although one journey
may be finishing,
the journey for you
will continue."*

Te Omanga Hospice

136 Woburn Road, PO Box 30814, Lower Hutt 5040

Telephone (04) 566 4535, Facsimile (04) 566 1548

www.teomanga.org.nz



Charities Commission # 22248



Te Omanga Hospice
Te Whare Manaaki Tangata



What to Expect When Someone is Dying

**This leaflet may help to reduce
anxiety about the unknown.**

Reassure the person by talking calmly, saying who you are, and holding their hand.

What to expect when someone is dying

The dying process is unique to each person, but in most cases there are common characteristics or changes that help to indicate a person is dying.

If you have never seen anyone die you may be afraid of what will happen, but the moment of death is rarely one of struggle.

Death usually comes gradually and peacefully, and there are many changes that signal life is coming to an end.

Most changes that occur at this time are normal. If you are unsure about anything, please talk to us.

Here are some of the changes that may occur when a person is dying.

Not eating and drinking

Eventually there will come a time when food and drink are neither wanted nor needed. This can be hard to accept, but it is a physical sign that the person is not going to get better. This can be a distressing time for family and whanau as food and drink are closely associated with nurturing.

Caring can be continued in other ways. Moistening the mouth with a wet, cool swab and applying lip balm may be all that is needed for comfort.

Change in awareness “withdrawing from the world”

As weakness increases, the person may spend more time in bed and have less interest in their surroundings.

This apparent lack of interest in one’s surroundings is a natural process which may be accompanied by feelings of tranquility. From a sleepy state, they may lapse into unconsciousness which may last for a very short time, or for several days. This can be a difficult and painful time for you.

Vision and Hearing

When vision decreases, leave a soft light on in the room.

Never assume that the person can’t hear you. Hearing is the last sense to be lost. Letting them know you are there will give them support and comfort.



Breathing

It is very common for breathing patterns to change. There may be gaps of seconds or minutes between breaths, with the gaps getting longer.

Occasionally in the last days of life there can be a noisy rattle to the breathing due to the build up of saliva and mucus that the person is unable to cough up. It isn’t distressing for the person who is dying, but it might be for you. If you are unsure about anything, please call the nurse. Medication and/or a change of position may help.

Incontinence

Sometimes, there is a loss of control of bowel and bladder. The nurse will check the person regularly to keep them dry and clean. Occasionally a small tube may be inserted into the bladder to drain urine for the person’s comfort.

Increased confusion and restlessness

You may notice increased restlessness: the person pulling at bedclothes, trying to get out of bed when they are too weak to stand, and muddled thinking. Try to reassure the person by talking calmly, saying who you are, and holding their hand. Sometimes medication may be needed to calm and soothe their restlessness.

Dignity

Partnership

Professionalism