

What do you do when your loved one has died?

You don't have to do anything straight away. If you are at home there is no need to call any emergency services. In hospital you do not need to push the emergency bell, just let your nurse know.

At this time you may wish to honour your loved one's spiritual and cultural traditions or ceremonies in a way that feels right and respectful.

Care of your loved one after death

If you are at home:

If it is appropriate and you want to, you can adjust their position so they're lying on their back with their head and chest slightly raised using pillows. Let your health professional know that they have died.

If you are in the hospital, hospice or at an aged residential care facility:

With permission, staff will wash your loved one, dress them in fresh clothes and provide clean bedding. They will ensure that their head and body are comfortably positioned, while also respecting any spiritual and cultural traditions that hold significance to you and your whānau during this time. If you prefer, these tasks can also be carried out by your whānau. Additionally, if there are specific clothing or personal items you would like to keep with your loved one, please let staff know and they will accommodate your wishes.

Support for you

If you feel the need for spiritual support, don't hesitate to reach out to your spiritual support person. They can provide valuable assistance during this time. Additionally, having your family, whānau or friends by your side to bid farewell to your loved one and offer you support, can be incredibly comforting.

What's next?

If you are at home:

It's important to arrange for your GP to visit and complete the death certificate.

If you are in the hospital, hospice, or an aged residential care facility:

The staff will take care of making arrangements for the Medical Officer or GP to complete the death certificate.

After death

When it comes to celebrating someone's life, there are countless ways to do so. Your loved one may have expressed their wishes beforehand.

You have the freedom to choose how to celebrate their life. It doesn't have to be a grand, formal event. A small gathering or private reflection can be just as meaningful. Seek support from professionals like funeral directors or chaplains if needed. Trust your instincts and do what feels right to you. Remember, simple yet heartfelt tributes can hold great power in honouring their memory.

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand

Arohanui
HOSPICE

What to expect when someone is dying?

This information is designed to ease any worries or fears you might have about what's to come.

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

Everyone's journey towards the end is one-of-a-kind, but there are usually some telltale signs or shifts that can give you an idea when your loved one is nearing the end.

Typically, death arrives slowly and peacefully. The majority of changes that take place during this period are natural and don't require any special intervention, hospitalisation, or professional assistance. However, if you have any concerns, please reach out to the healthcare professional who is assisting you for guidance. Let's take a look at some of the changes that might happen when your loved one is nearing the end of their life.

Not eating and drinking

At some point, there will be a time when they no longer want or need food and drink. It can be difficult to come to terms with this, but it's a physical indication that your loved one's condition will not improve. However, there are other ways to provide care and support. Keeping the mouth moist can provide comfort and simple measures like offering ice chips or allowing them to suck on swabs soaked in their favourite drink are enough.

Change in awareness

As your loved one grows weaker, they may spend more time in bed and show less interest in their surroundings. They might gradually become very sleepy and eventually slip into unconsciousness. This state of unconsciousness can last for a brief period or continue for several days.

Breathing

It's quite common for breathing patterns to change during this time. It's normal to observe changes in the rhythm and depth of breathing, and pauses of a few seconds or even minutes between breaths, with the duration of these gaps gradually increasing.

Bladder and bowel changes

Occasionally, there may be a loss of control over bowel and bladder functions. Your healthcare professional can help with advice and supplies to make this easier to manage.

Increased confusion and restlessness

You might notice your loved one becoming more restless – tugging at the bed sheets, attempting to get up even though they're too weak, or having confused thoughts and conversations. In these moments, try to provide reassurance by speaking calmly, reminding them who you are and holding their hand. Occasionally, medication may be necessary to help calm and comfort them during these restless periods.

Skin changes

You might notice that their arms and legs feel cool and sweaty, and they might look a bit blotchy and darker than usual – this doesn't necessarily mean they're feeling cold.

How to tell if your loved one has died

- Breathing has stopped.
- You can't see or feel their heartbeat.
- There is no response when you touch them or talk loudly.
- Eyes are fixed on a certain spot, pupils are large and eyelids may be open.
- Jaw relaxes and mouth stays open.
- Possible loss of control of bladder and bowel movement.

***Mā tō reo ia e mōhio koe,
puritia tōna ringa.***

Try to reassure the person by talking calmly, saying who you are, and holding their hand.