

## Can My Loved One Still Hear Me?

Since it is believed that hearing is the last of the senses to fade, we encourage you to talk with your loved one or provide comforting sounds.

### Ways You Can Provide Comfort

- » Tell your loved one things you want him or her to know.
- » Thank your loved one for special moments you have shared.
- » Share favorite stories, poems or reflections.
- » Talk about favorite memories, and share photographs, scrapbooks and other special memorabilia.
- » Play favorite music or recordings of comforting sounds.
- » Read scriptural passages or other sacred readings.
- » Pray in ways that are meaningful.
- » Engage in normal conversation around the bedside to help your loved one feel included.

## Is it Helpful For Me to Say Goodbye?

Sometimes it may seem like a person is “holding on” or struggling in their dying process. Some times it seems that people find it helpful to know their loved ones will be okay once they are gone, and seem to need “permission” from their families and friends to let go. Though it is hard, you may wish to tell your loved one you will be okay and that it is time to let go.

For some people, tears are a normal and natural part of saying goodbye. Crying may be a way of expressing love and may be helpful to you and your loved one as you let go. Do not be afraid or embarrassed if you or your loved one cry at this time.

## What are the Signs That a Person Has Died?

Here are some signs that tell us when someone has died:

- » Breathing stops.
- » The heart stops beating.
- » The body may feel cool when touched.
- » Eyes may remain open; and pupils may become large.
- » The mouth may remain slightly open.
- » Skin color changes as blood settles inside the body.
- » Muscles relax and may cause body fluids to be released.
- » Muscles begin to stiffen within four to six hours after death.

## What Will Happen Next?

Once your loved one has died, there may be other things that need to be completed. A member of the care team will explain this to you, and can help you with any arrangements.

Please feel free to spend time in the room as you would like, and let us know if we can help you make any contacts with other friends and family members.

We want to honor each person’s cultural, religious and spiritual needs, particularly at the end of life, so please talk with the chaplain or other care team members about any special needs or requests you have at this time.



### Treasured Seasons

For everything there is an appointed season.

And a time for everything under heaven.

A time for sowing,

A time for reaping;

A time for sharing,

A time for caring.

A time for loving,

A time for giving;

A time for remembering,

A time for parting.

You have made everything beautiful in its time.

For everything You do remains forever.

– Adapted from Eccl. 3

The CHI Health Mission calls us to give special care to our patients and families at the end of life. Our staff acknowledges the privilege of being with you and your loved one at this holy time.

### CARE TEAM CONTACT INFORMATION:

---

---

---

---

---



Imagine better health.<sup>SM</sup>

## Caring for Your Loved One at the End of Life



1-800-253-4368  
CHIhealth.com

Alegent Creighton Health  
is now CHI Health.



*At CHI Health we provide compassionate care for the body, mind and spirit of our patients and their families. This is especially true when providing care during the last days and hours of life. Our goal is to support you at this difficult time by offering information about what you can expect will happen to your loved one, and by sharing ideas about ways to provide comfort.*

## **What Signs and Symptoms Will I See?**

Although each person is unique, the following signs and symptoms are common at end of life. If you have questions, or if you would like more information, you may wish to speak with the care team.

### **ANXIETY**

Some people may be concerned with physical and emotional changes, which may cause anxiety. They may be concerned about grief over losses and life changes, spiritual concerns, coping with their own dying process, concern for remaining family members, and worry about “unfinished business”.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Allow your loved one to talk about concerns, feelings and fears.
- » Encourage your loved one to talk with members of the care team.
- » Practice relaxation techniques and other ways to reduce anxiety.
- » When anxiety is distressing for your loved one, talk with the care team about medications and other interventions.

### **CONFUSION AND RESTLESSNESS**

Some people become more confused or restless at the end of life. Others become more alert. Sometimes, people may see or speak with friends or relatives who are not really there or who have already passed away.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Allow your loved one to talk about things and people he or she sees, if it seems comforting.
- » Speak calmly to provide reassurance.
- » Let your loved one know you are present by providing a gentle touch or holding a hand.
- » If confusion seems upsetting, remind your loved one who and where you are.
- » Talk with your care team about any medications or other treatments that may be appropriate to help your loved one with confusion and restlessness.

### **SLEEPINESS**

Some people spend more time sleeping and at times may be difficult to awaken. This is because the body is slowing down and has less energy.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Allow your loved one to rest as much as preferred.
- » If possible, arrange for activities and visits with family and friends at times when your loved one is more awake and alert.

### **FATIGUE, TIREDNESS AND A DESIRE FOR QUIET**

Some people feel fatigued or tired, or may lack energy during this time. They may feel weak, be less interested in activities they enjoy, and may have memory problems or a lack of mental focus. They may wish to be quiet, and prefer to have only a few people around. They may also experience changes in their mood, or begin to withdraw from those close to them.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Respect your loved one’s desire to be alone or to have a small number of visitors.
- » Keep the lights dim, and play soft music, if that is okay with your loved one.
- » If it provides comfort, simply be present and hold your loved one’s hand within the silence.
- » Allow for rest between activities.

### **DECREASED HUNGER AND THIRST**

Some people do not want to eat or drink as the body begins to slow down and nutritional needs change. Others may not be able to eat and drink as much as they could before. This is the natural way that the body protects itself from food and liquids it can no longer digest or absorb. Too much food or drink may

cause nausea, vomiting, lung congestion or other increased fluids in the body tissues.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » If your loved one would like to eat or drink, offer small bites or sips of favorite foods or drinks.
- » Offer ice chips, frozen popsicles, slushes, or sips of cool drinks if your loved one’s mouth is dry.
- » Offer small lollipops to provide a pleasant taste (the sticks will help prevent choking).
- » If it is comforting to your loved one, provide opportunities to savor a taste of a favorite food or drink, then spit it out if it is difficult to swallow.
- » Moisten lips with Vaseline or lip balm.
- » Moisten the mouth with liquid-soaked mouth swabs (ask your care team for more information about this).

### **CHANGES IN SKIN COLOR**

The skin on some areas of the body may become fragile and can easily tear. The skin may also become cool to the touch, especially on the hands and feet. It may also become spotty or darker in color. This is the result of slowing blood circulation.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Talk with the care team about protecting bony points on the body, such as the spine, ankles, heels, elbows, shoulder blades and hips.
- » If it is not painful, reposition your loved one occasionally.
- » Cover your loved one with a light sheet or warm blanket. Avoid using electric blankets as they may cause burns or the cords may be dangerous.
- » Gently apply lotion, if the skin is not too fragile and if this does not cause pain.

### **CHANGES IN BOWEL AND BLADDER FUNCTION**

Some people experience a loss of bladder and bowel control. If a bladder catheter is in place, there may be changes in the amount of fluids in the catheter bag.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Assure that you understand and recognize the loss of bladder or bowel control is because of the disease.
- » Place plastic-backed pads on the bed to keep your loved one and the bed clean and dry.
- » Talk with the care team about bladder and bowel changes you notice, and ask them about products and treatments that help with comfort.

- » Talk with your care team if your loved one experiences diarrhea or frequent watery stools because this can increase discomfort and skin breakdown.
- » If your loved one experiences constipation, talk with your care team about ways to help.

### **CHANGES IN BREATHING**

Some people experience changes in breathing patterns as the body slows down. Breathing may become irregular or there may be periods of a few seconds with no breathing at all. This is referred to as “apnea” and is common at this time.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » It may be helpful to prop your loved one’s head with pillows or raise the head of the bed to make breathing easier.
- » Running a circulating fan in the room may be helpful.

### **RATTLING IN THE THROAT**

Some people start to have a rattling sound coming from their throat when they are unconscious and no longer able to cough or swallow well. This is produced by mucus or saliva in the throat and upper airway. It does not indicate choking. While this rattling does not cause discomfort, sometimes medications can quiet this sound if it is distressing to you and others.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Reposition your loved one or elevate the head of the bed.
- » If it is not uncomfortable use foam-tipped swabs to clear excess fluids from around the mouth.
- » Talk with the care team if you notice white patches in the mouth or on the tongue, as this may indicate an infection, and may need to be treated so that your loved one is more comfortable.

### **UNCONSCIOUSNESS OR UNRESPONSIVENESS**

Some people become unconscious or unresponsive during the dying process. Your loved one may only respond slightly or not at all to voices or touch, even though the eyes might be slightly opened.

#### **Ways You Can Provide Comfort**

- » Provide a calming presence by sitting quietly at your loved one’s bedside.