

Palliative Care, Comfort Care, and End of Life Support

Guidance for comfort, decisions, and family support

Easy guide for families

Why this matters

Serious illness can bring pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, anxiety, and difficult decisions. Palliative care focuses on comfort and quality of life, while hospice care focuses on comfort near the end of life.

What you may notice

- More time in bed or less interest in activities
- Increasing pain, breathing trouble, or fatigue
- Reduced appetite or drinking
- Need for more help with every daily task
- Family uncertainty about goals of care

Daily care at home

1. Ask what matters most to the person and share that with the care team.
2. Treat symptoms early: pain, constipation, anxiety, nausea, and shortness of breath.
3. Keep the room calm, the body clean and repositioned, and the mouth moist.
4. Use simple choices and speak gently, even if the person speaks less.
5. Accept help from hospice, palliative, faith, or community support when offered.

When to call the doctor

- Pain, anxiety, nausea, or breathing trouble
- New skin breakdown, agitation, or delirium
- Trouble swallowing medicines or fluids
- Family uncertainty about next steps or expected changes
- You think hospice or palliative support may now be appropriate

Call 911 now if...

- There is severe distress if no comfort plan is in place
- You are unsure whether to call hospice; call them and describe what you see
- There is uncontrolled bleeding or a major fall injury

Questions for the care team

- What are our goals right now: longer life, comfort, or both?
- What symptoms should we expect, and how should we respond?
- Who should we call first after hours?
- What documents or decisions should be updated now?

Quick daily checklist

- Comfort symptoms checked
- Mouth care provided
- Skin checked
- Repositioning
- Quiet support offered
- Important phone numbers visible

Safety first

Comfort care is active care. It includes symptom relief, communication, skin protection, emotional support, and respect for the persons wishes and values.

Caregiver reminder

You are not failing when you ask for more support. Comfort-focused care can be deeply compassionate, skilled, and loving.

