


Spending
the **last days**
together

A decorative graphic of numerous pink butterflies of various sizes, arranged in a descending, curved path from the top left towards the bottom right of the page.

A Caregiver's Guide



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Introduction



Caring for someone who is dying is not an easy task. We understand that this is not an easy time for you and your family.

This guide is specially prepared to help your loved one spend the last days of his or her life in warmth and comfort.

Specially written for one with no clinical or nursing experience, this guide contains useful suggestions and instructions on basic caregiving skills.

Procedures for death certification and useful contact numbers are included for your convenience.

Most people prefer to spend the last days of their lives in warm, comfortable and familiar surroundings, and in the presence of their loved ones.

For a person who is nearing the end of his or her life, dying is often a slow process, lasting from several days to a week. But sometimes, it can happen in a few hours.



Tips to Keep Your Loved One Comfortable



Here are some tips on how to keep your loved one comfortable.

Environment

- ✿ Maintain a pleasant room atmosphere.
- ✿ Avoid using bright lights which may be glaring to the eyes.
- ✿ Play soothing music at a low volume near the bedside. Music can create a sense of calm and serenity for your loved one.
- ✿ Sit and hold your loved one's hand. Gently massage or stroke his or her hands and feet. The sense of touch eases suffering and promotes comfort.

Nutrition

- ✿ Your loved one does not require much calories at this stage. Offer food in small amounts but do not insist if he or she does not want to eat.
- ✿ Small chips of ice or frozen juice may be refreshing in the mouth if he or she can tolerate the cold.
- ✿ If your loved one is able to swallow, fluids may be given in small amounts by a syringe.

Oral Care

- ✿ Clean his or her mouth with wet cotton balls or moist swabs at least once or twice a day to keep the mouth clean and moist.
- ✿ If your loved one wears dentures, it should be removed for cleansing.
- ✿ Apply lip balm if his or her lips are dry.
- ✿ If your loved one is conscious, offer ice chips or sips of water to keep his or her mouth moist.

Hygiene

- ✿ Sponge your loved one in bed to maintain hygiene and to promote comfort.

Skin Care

- ✿ Gently turn your loved one every two to three hours in the following order; left > back > right. This can help prevent bedsores (due to the prolonged lack of body movement) from developing.
- ✿ Elevate your loved one's head with pillows and gently turn his or her head to the side to avoid prolonged pressure on the ears.
- ✿ Apply normal saline eye drops twice a day to prevent dryness.

Bowels & Bladder Care

- ✿ Use barrier cream to prevent your loved one's skin from coming into contact with excretions.
- ✿ Change his or her diapers when soiled to promote comfort.
- ✿ Use wet wipes to cleanse skin if soiled.

Spiritual Support

- ✿ Spiritual support from an organised religion or through your own spiritual beliefs and values can be helpful.



What to Expect as Death Approaches



By now, it would be obvious to you that your loved one is very frail and weak.

He or she is now spending most of his or her time in bed and is asleep more often than not. He or she also shows no interest in food or drinks and there is hardly any food or fluid intake.

This is expected as the body system winds down and the need for energy (metabolic rate) slows as the end draws near.

As death approaches,

- ✿ Your loved one's level of consciousness will further deteriorate and he or she may subsequently lose consciousness totally.
- ✿ His or her pulse will get weaker and the hands and feet will become cool to the touch as a result of decreased blood circulation. Keep your loved one sufficiently warm with a blanket.
- ✿ Your loved one's breathing may be laboured and he or she may appear to be gasping. There may be pauses in breathing that can last up to a minute or so.
- ✿ His or her complexion will become pale with a yellowish hue.
- ✿ There may be an increase in throat secretions. These often collect in the back of the throat and cause gurgling sounds when the person breathes. Turning him or her to the side will help him or her breathe more easily.
- ✿ Other signs may include increased confusion or seeing people or things that no one else sees. Reassure your loved one if he or she becomes restless.

Occasionally, your loved one may linger on despite signs of impending death. This may happen when he or she is trying to hold on to life, especially when he or she is uncertain if the ones left behind will be able to cope, or if there is some unfinished business.

This can take place with much discomfort for him or her. What you can do is to reassure him or her that it is alright to let go.

In other words, give him or her the assurance that he or she can leave this world in peace.

Death occurs when breathing has stopped completely and a pulse is not felt anymore. Other signs of death would include a cessation of heartbeat, enlarged pupils, fixed position of the eyes, slightly opened eyelids, a relaxed jaw, a partially opened mouth, and bowel or bladder soiling.



How to Arrange for Death Certification



If you are at home

Upon discharge from hospital, you would have been given a memo stating your loved one's medical problems. The possible diagnosis as the cause of death will also be noted down. This will help the person issuing the Certificate of Cause of Death (CCOD) even if they have not seen your loved one before.

Signing of the CCOD can be arranged by:

- ✿ Calling your family doctor who may know your loved one and is willing to make a home visit.
- ✿ Calling the home hospice support team if your loved one is under their care.
- ✿ Calling a casket company who may be able to arrange for a doctor to sign the CCOD.

If you are in the hospital

You will be given a CCOD by the hospital if the cause of death is known and the cause is natural, upon producing the identity documents of your loved one.

What happens if the doctor is unable to certify the death of your loved one?

If the doctor is unable to certify the cause of death, your loved one will be sent to the Mortuary @ HSA (located at Block 9, Singapore General Hospital) in a Police Hearse. You will be told when to go down to the Mortuary @ HSA (usually the next day).

What to bring to the Mortuary @ HSA?

- ✿ All available medical documents relating to your loved one.
- ✿ All medications belonging to your loved one.
- ✿ Identification papers of your loved one and the informant (e.g. NRIC / FIN Card / Passport / Certificate of Citizenship / Birth Certificate / PIN-card).

At the Mortuary @ HSA

The coroner will review the case and determine if an autopsy is required. The family will be informed of the coroner's decision and when to claim the body of their loved one.

Opening Hours of Mortuary @ HSA

Monday to Friday	8.00am - 4.30pm
Saturday, Sunday & Public Holidays	8.00am - 12.30pm



What to Do After Obtaining the Certificate of Cause of Death (CCOD)



What to Do After Obtaining the Certificate of Cause of Death (CCOD)

If you are at home

You or your relatives will need to engage a doctor to certify the death. The doctor will certify the death online and the death will be automatically registered. You may wish to call one of following services:

Trinity Housecall (24Hours) 8223 4999

Healthway Medical Service (24Hours) 8448 6788

Speedoc (24 Hours) 6909 7799

MW Medical (24Hours) 6250 0625

If you are in Alexandra Hospital (AH)

The doctor at the hospital will certify the death online and the death will be automatically registered.

You can contact one of the casket companies from The Association of Funeral Directors Singapore's website at <http://afd.org.sg/>.

What do you need to do if you wish to bury your loved one's body outside of Singapore?

A Coffin (Export) Permit is required to take the body of your loved one out of Singapore. You may apply for the permit from the following offices, which are open 24 hours, 7 days a week.

- I. **Port Health Office**
4545 Jalan Bukit Merah
Singapore 159466
Tel : 6222 2585
Fax : 6222 8543



Grief and Bereavement



Grief and Bereavement

Understanding Grief and Bereavement

Grief is a normal response to the loss. Bereavement is the term used for the experience following the death of a loved one. Everyone experiences and expresses grief differently.

Examples of how grief may affect you include:

- ✿ Difficulty falling asleep
- ✿ Loss of appetite
- ✿ Tiredness
- ✿ Crying, or generally feeling emotional
- ✿ Thinking about your loved one, hearing their voice, expecting them to walk through the door

It is normal to find yourself going back and forth in the grief process. Everyone is different in how they grieve, and the hurt does lessen with time.

Helping yourself in times of grief

- ✿ Ask for help and accept help and support when offered.
- ✿ Find someone who cares, and with whom you can share freely.
- ✿ Express your feelings.
- ✿ Look after your health.
- ✿ Take time to remember the person.
- ✿ Do not take on new responsibilities right away if you do not feel ready.

Helping others who are grieving

- ✿ Be there to offer support over time, even if this is simply by being silent.
- ✿ Listen without judgement.
- ✿ Offer help with normal daily tasks.
- ✿ Be patient with yourself and the person. Remember, we are all different.
- ✿ Pay attention to warning signs of depression or suicide, and seek professional help if necessary.

When grieving becomes difficult

Professional help may be needed when a person is:

- ✿ Overwhelmed by feelings or the opposite, i.e. feeling numb
- ✿ Prolonged inability to recognise that loss has happened
- ✿ Depression and/or thoughts of suicide
- ✿ Self-neglect, risky behaviour, or increased use of alcohol or drugs
- ✿ Prolonged disturbance of sleep, appetite, and usual family and/or work activities

If your grief reactions remain intense for more than a year after the death, you may be experiencing clinical depression and should consult a healthcare professional for help.

Resources

Bereavement Support & Counselling Services

Care and Counselling, Alexandra Hospital

Monday to Friday, 8.30am - 5.30pm
Tel: 6379 3260 / 6379 3261
(Please request to speak to a medical social worker.)

HELP Family Service Centre

Monday to Friday, 9.00am - 6.00pm
Tel: 6457 5188

Hospice Home Care Services

Request to speak to your hospice nurse

National Family Service Centre Helpline

Tel: 1800 838 0100

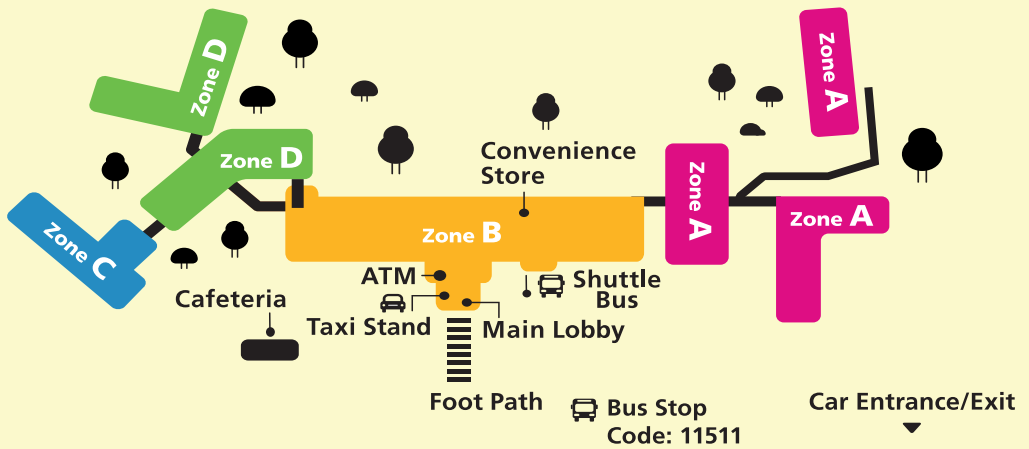
For Information after Death, Cremation, Burial, Columbarium and Ash Scattering Services

National Environment Agency

NEA Customer Service Hotline
Tel: 1800 225 5632

“Grieving is an expression of gratitude,
and that expression doesn’t have to be rushed.”

~ Carolyn Wells



Scan the QR code to find directions and locate our facilities!

The information provided in this publication is meant purely for educational purposes and may not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. You should seek the advice of your doctor or a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical conditions. Information is accurate at time of printing (Apr 2023) and subject to revision without prior notice.

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