



DOVER PARK HOSPICE
Every Moment Matters

When Death Approaches



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Introduction

This guide contains vital information to prepare for the inevitable passing.

Being well informed would allow you to focus on being with your loved ones in their final moments, rather than becoming overwhelmed by fact-finding.

It is written for Home Care recipients, though some information is applicable to all.

Nevertheless, please approach your clinical team if you need any help. Remember that you are not alone during this time.

What to Expect as Death Approaches?

Possible signs and symptoms

- Spending more time sleeping. At times, difficult to arouse.
- Decreased interest in food or drinks.
- Deterioration in level of consciousness, sometimes confused
- Extremities become cool to touch. The underside of the body and soles of feet become darker in colour.
- Loss of urine or bowel control.
- Volume of urine output decreased.
- Laboured breathing and/or gasping. There might be periods of irregular breathing and moments of cessation interspersed by rapid, shallow breathing.
- Rattling throat secretions can be heard.

Tips to ensure comfort

- Communicate when your loved one is most alert.
- Never assume that he/ she cannot hear us. Hearing is the last sense to be lost. Continue to talk calmly and reassuringly to provide them comfort and support.
- Discontinue non-essential medication, as advised by doctors or nurses.
- Offer food in small amounts, at frequent intervals but do not insist if he/ she is disinterested in eating.
- Give small ice chips, frozen juice or sips of water in a teaspoon or syringe if your loved one is able to swallow.
- Keep the mouth clean and moist with moist cotton wool or gauze. Lip balm can be applied liberally.
- Attend to care of the eyes, skin and hygiene. These are equally important.
- Change diapers when soiled. Barrier cream can be applied as required.

- Regular change of position in bed every 2-3 hours helps prevent redness and pressure sores.
- For noisy breathing, gentle chest tapping or removing the pillow from the head and turning to a side position can aid saliva to flow into the cheek. This can easily wipe away. A suction machine is not necessary.
- Change in breathing signifies that the time is near. Do not be alarmed. He/she is usually not distressed by this. Oxygen is not necessary. It would be best to keep vigil and spend these last moments with your loved one.
- Maintain a pleasant room atmosphere.

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When your loved one passes away at home

Signs of Death

- No spontaneous breathing
- Pulses not felt or seen
- Heartbeat not felt, seen or heard
- No response to shaking or shouting
- Eyelids may be slightly open, pupils enlarged, and eyes fixed in one position
- Jaw may be relaxed with mouth partially open

What to do when your loved one stops breathing?

- Stay calm. Observe for 10 mins to ensure that he/she has stopped breathing
- Note the time he/she stopped breathing
- Inform family members. Spend some quiet moments

- If there is an air conditioner in the room, switch it on to keep the room cool
- Prepare an official identification document bearing his/her photo (e.g. NRIC), and the Dover Park Home Care blue/yellow/green file, and/or a hospital discharge memo
- Inform Dover Park Home Care team (For HC patients)
- Arrange for death certification

Do not call the Police, 995 or the ambulance service.

How to arrange for the death certificate?

An electronic (digital) Death Certificate (e-DC), or Confirmation of Death (COD), which is a hardcopy version (if online system down), is required before a funeral arrangement can take place.

You can contact or approach:

- A familiar family doctor who attended to the deceased previously, or
- A funeral director (who can help arrange a doctor to certify death)

For Home Care recipients, the latest list of GPs assisting with electronic Death Certificates or Confirmation of Death was provided in the Caregivers Resource File.

What to do after a doctor has completed the death certification online, or issued a COD?

- Go to My Legacy website (www.mylegacy.gov.sg) to download the e-DC within 30 days
- To download, the next-of-kin will need to enter the following identifiers:

a) death certificate number, or COD number (when online system resumes), provided by the doctor;

b) deceased's identification document number used for the death certification;

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a) death certificate number, or COD number (when online system resumes), provided by the doctor;

b) deceased's identification document number used for the death certification;

c) date of death.

Contact a funeral service provider for a funeral arrangement.

Dover Park Home Care does not endorse any funeral service providers.

For further information, please refer to the websites below or contact the Dover Park Home Care team.

Resources

[National Environment Agency](#)

[Association of Funeral Directors Singapore](#)