

# More Signs and Symptoms

The following signs and symptoms may come and go, may not occur in the order listed, or even within the same time frame. Not everyone experiences all of these signs or symptoms:

## ONE TO THREE MONTHS

- Decrease in appetite
- Less communication and conversation
- Increase in sleep
- Withdrawal from normal activities

## ONE TO TWO WEEKS

- Changes in skin color
- Changes in breathing pattern
- Congestion, “rattling” breathing sounds
- Unable to clear saliva
- Decrease in appetite or refusal to eat
- Change in body temperature
- May be bedbound or have a marked decrease in activity
- Unable to swallow pills or refusing regular medications

## DAYS TO HOURS

- Erratic or irregular breathing pattern or pauses between breaths
- Restless or no activity
- Decreased urine output
- Changes in bowel or bladder function
- May have a day of renewed energy and activity, called a “rally” day
- Change in skin color

- High fever with minimal discomfort
- Eyes remain half-open
- May stop talking/responding but probably able to hear
- Rapid heart rate
- May see or talk to people who aren’t there, including people who have previously died
- Swelling of hands, arms, legs
- Family pets may act differently

## WHEN DEATH OCCURS

- Breathing and heartbeat stop and do not resume
- Sometimes there is a release of bowel and bladder
- The person cannot be awakened
- The jaw is relaxed and the mouth may be open
- The eyelids may be open

At the time of death, call Hosparus Health. A team member will be sent to your home to provide support and help make the necessary phone calls to the funeral home. If residing in a nursing facility, please remind the facility staff to call Hosparus Health.



Since 1978, Hosparus Health, a fully accredited not-for-profit hospice and palliative care organization, has provided medical care, grief counseling, symptom and medication management and more for people facing serious and chronic illnesses in Kentucky and Indiana.

Call 800-264-0521 today or visit [HosparusHealth.org](https://HosparusHealth.org).

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# What to Expect at the End of Life



WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE END OF LIFE CAN BE A ROLLER COASTER OF PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES. THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO EXPERIENCE THIS. OUR GOAL IS TO FIND OUT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND HELP YOU REACH YOUR GOALS.

Just as we tend to your physical needs, we know that you will need emotional and spiritual support to deal with grief, loss and the changes this experience brings. We want you and your family to feel very confident about your care. Our trained professional teams are here to listen, support and guide you and your family through this experience. This is your journey and we honor your unique values, wishes and needs.

## For the Caregiver

Getting enough rest and nourishment are beneficial for caregivers. It requires a lot of energy to provide care through this time. Allow friends and family to help and remember it is okay to ask for help.

As death nears, it’s okay to say good-bye. This is a very personal time with no rights or wrongs. Saying good-bye might be as simple as saying I love you, thank you, or saying a prayer. Be

aware that feelings of sadness, anger, helplessness, depression, guilt and fear are normal. Talking with a friend or Hosparus Health team member about your feelings can be helpful.

We realize that reading this information may be difficult. Hosparus Health wants you and your family to feel very confident and know what to expect during this time.

## The Last Stages

As the body prepares itself for the final stage of life, there is a process of “shutting down” that is natural but can be frightening if you are unprepared. We want to provide information and support that will help you know what to expect at the time of death and help your family feel very confident during this time. Some of the changes discussed here will come and go and may not occur in the order listed or even within the same timeframe. We all live each stage of our life in a unique way, and that includes our dying.

### ORAL INTAKE

There may be a decrease in appetite and thirst. This is part of the natural dying process as the body begins to shut down. Ice chips or a frozen juice may be refreshing, but do not force someone to eat or drink. Good mouth care is very important at this time.

### ALERTNESS

More time may be spent sleeping and less time talking. It is important to continue conversation, but speak softly and naturally, ask simple questions that have an easy response, like a nod. It may be comforting to simply share time sitting quietly holding hands.

### RESTLESSNESS

A person may become restless, picking at the air or bedclothes, or have difficulty sleeping. A person who has been bedfast may even try to get out of bed and walk. Your Hosparus Health team can recommend medication or make other suggestions.

### TEMPERATURE

Body temperature may increase or decrease. These changes are natural and a result of the body slowing down. As circulation slows down, arms, legs and the underside of the body may take on a blue-purple color

### BOWEL/BLADDER ELIMINATION

Urine output lessens, often becoming darker with a strong odor. Bladder and bowel control may be lost. If this occurs, it is important to keep skin clean and dry.

### ACTIVITY

Withdrawal from normal activities may be noticed. It is not unusual for past interests and hobbies to be set aside. This may include less verbal communication. A person may experience an unexpected surge of energy and may become more alert asking for a favorite food or activity. This experience is usually brief.

### BREATHING PATTERN

Breathing often becomes irregular and may vary from very shallow to very deep. Breathing may stop for 10-30 seconds; with breaths coming only 2-3 times per minute for a long period of time. This is a natural part of the dying process. Mucous can gather in the back of the throat and cause a rattling sound that can be very disturbing. Raising the head of the bed or turning from side to side may help. Let your Hosparus Health team know, because there may be medications and positions that can help provide relief.

## Resources

Your loved one’s favorite readings, music, photos or other items of meaning may be comforting. These resources may also help:

**Ceremonies of Passage - Readings and Rituals to Enrich the Dying Experience.** Available from Hosparus Health.

**Staying Connected at the End of Life: A Guide for Parents.** Available from Hosparus Health.

**Dying Well.** By Ira Byock, MD (1998). NY: Riverhead Books. ISBN 1573226572. Available through any bookstore.

**Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs and Communications of the Dying.** By Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley (1997). NY: Bantam Books. ISBN 0553378767.