



Recognizing the signs of Dying

A guide for volunteers & caregivers





Why it's important to talk about this

- So that caregivers and volunteers feel better prepared to deal with death
- To promote understanding and compassion among the patient's support system
- To encourage comfort and emotional support for the dying patient



The Process of Dying

- Dying is usually a gradual process that can last days to weeks
- Physical, emotional, and spiritual changes occur
- Each person's experience is unique



Physical Signs: Early Stage

- Increased fatigue and need for rest
- Reduced appetite and fluid intake
- Changes in breathing rhythm (may be subtle)
- Withdrawal from social interaction



Physical Signs: Late Stage

- Irregular or shallow breathing (Cheyne-Stokes pattern)
- Coolness in hands, feet, and legs
- Mottled or bluish skin, especially on extremities
- Decreased urine output



Emotional & Mental Changes

- Periods of confusion or disorientation
- Talking to unseen people or recalling past events
- Restlessness or agitation
- Desire for solitude



Caring for Physical Comfort

- Keep the person's mouth and lips moist
- Adjust positioning for comfort and easier breathing
- Use soft blankets for warmth
- Reduce noise and bright lights

Emotional & Spiritual Support



- Sit quietly and listen without judgment
- Offer gentle touch if welcome
- Respect cultural and personal beliefs
- Support meaningful conversations and closure



When Death is Near

- Irregular breathing (Cheyne-Stokes)
- Death Rattle
- Unresponsiveness
- Eyes partially open but not focused
- Breathing stops, heart stops beating

Final Thoughts



- Recognizing signs can help us provide calm, compassionate presence
- Focus on comfort, dignity, and respect
- End-of-life care is about honoring the person's journey



References

<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/advanced-cancer/care-choices/care-fact-sheet#what-are-the-signs-that-death-is-approaching-and-what-can-the-caregiver-do-to-make-the-person-comfortable-during-this-time>

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/the-journey-towards-death-1132504>

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/end-of-life/last-weeks-of-life>