



HOT TIP
October
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Northern Health Palliative Care

Changes in the Last Days and Hours

When a person is close to dying, there may be physical changes that occur. Not every person who is dying will experience all the changes and they may not occur in a specific order. Sharing this information about expected changes with family and caregivers can help to alleviate their concerns and help them to plan and participate in the care of their loved one.

Decreased Physical Strength and Increased Drowsiness

- As death nears, strength will decrease, and more time is spent sleeping.

Reduced Intake and Difficulty Swallowing

- Intake naturally decreases and usually switches from solids to fluids only, fluids to just sips and then eventually no oral intake.

Delirium and Confusion

- It is common for dying people to have symptoms of delirium. May include confusion, difficulty focussing or misperceptions of events.

Agitation and Restlessness

- The dying person may want to be moving more, sometimes without knowing why or what they want to do.

Unresponsiveness

- The dying person will respond less to stimulation. They may initially be easily roused from their sleep and then progress to a deeper sleep and not respond to a stimulus.

Irregular Breathing

- Breathing usually becomes irregular with gaps in breathing. These gaps usually become more frequent and longer in duration.

Congested or Noisy Breathing

- Moisture from the mouth, throat and/or lungs collect in the airways and the dying person is unable to clear secretions by swallowing/coughing. Most often the person is not aware of this and is not distressed by it.

Changes in Skin Colour and Temperature

- As the person gets closer to dying, they may feel cool to touch and skin may be blue/purplish or mottled.