

The Natural Dying Process

Knowing what to expect as death approaches can help make this time less worrying. Described here, are some of the changes that commonly occur when someone is nearing the end of their life. These are part of a natural process. Each person is unique & changes may not occur in every instance or in any particular order or timeframe.

Food and fluids

It is common for people to lose interest and enjoyment in eating, and want little, or no food or drink. Swallowing will become weaker, and the dying person may eventually be unable to swallow. The body's need for fluid reduces, and forcing a person to eat or drink can cause discomfort. Be guided by the person's wishes.

Sleep

As death approaches, people usually become very weak and drowsy, sleeping more and becoming harder to wake up. They will be less able, and eventually unable to stand and walk. They may also be less able to communicate.

Confusion

The person may become confused about time, place and the identity of familiar people. They may seem to say nonsensical things, or appear to respond to people who can't be seen in the room by others.

Restlessness and agitation

Signs include twitching, plucking at the air or the bedclothes, and trying to get out of bed even when the person is weak and unable to stand alone.

Restlessness may be caused by constipation, a full bladder or other discomfort, or from the irreversible effects of the person's disease.

Breathing

The person's breathing pattern will change and become more irregular. Periods of shallow and rapid breathing may alternate. There may be long pauses between breaths.

Sometimes saliva and mucus increase as the person becomes too weak to cough or swallow. This can create, noisy gurgling breathing that can be distressing to listen to.

Skin changes

There may be noticeable changes in the temperature and appearance of the skin. The person may become warm and flushed.

The person's hands and feet, nose and ears may feel cooler. Nail beds may also look pale, and develop a bluish tinge.

Swelling of the feet and legs, hands and arms, face or other parts of the body may occur.

Many whanau / families find this time difficult because they are unsure how to help. If you have any concerns or questions, please ring hospice. We are here to support you, and provide care that allows the person to die naturally with comfort and dignity.