

## How will I know when death is close?

Your person will no longer respond to your voice or touch. It is important to continue to talk to them.

Your person may moan which could be due to pain or could be related to the muscles in their jaw becoming relaxed.

Breathing may change, and your person may stop breathing for several seconds.

Your healthcare team will inform you of changes that they are noticing but no one can predict exactly when death will occur.

When a person dies

- They will no longer be breathing
- They will no longer be able to respond to you
- There will be no pulse
- A person's eyes may be open or closed
- A person's mouth may be open as the jaw muscle is relaxed

A Nurse or Physician will pronounce that your person has died.

You may experience different emotions and this is normal. If you would like additional support or resources please see below for some recommended resources:

**Scarborough Centre for Health Communities Grief Support**  
[schcontario.ca/programs/health-services/bereavement-care/](http://schcontario.ca/programs/health-services/bereavement-care/)

**Canadian Virtual Hospice**  
[Virtualhospice.ca](http://Virtualhospice.ca)

**Hospice Palliative Care Ontario**  
[Caregiversupport.hpcoco.ca](http://Caregiversupport.hpcoco.ca)

## Questions for your healthcare team:

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### Contact us:

**SHN Bryan and Bette Rowntree Palliative Care Clinical Centre Program**  
416-284-8131 ext 5035

**Outpatient Palliative Care Clinic**  
416-284-8131 ext 5035

# Last Days and Hours of Life

## What to expect

**SHN BRYAN AND BETTE ROWNTREE PALLIATIVE CARE CLINICAL CENTRE PROGRAM**



### Birchmount Hospital

3030 Birchmount Road  
Scarborough, ON M1W 3W3  
416-495-2400

### Centenary Hospital

2867 Ellesmere Road  
Scarborough, ON M1E 4B9  
416-284-8131

### General Hospital

3050 Lawrence Avenue East  
Scarborough, ON M1P 2V5  
416-438-2911

 @SHNcares

 [shn.ca](http://shn.ca)

## The Dying Process

Dying can affect you and your person physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially. This resource was created to help you anticipate what may happen near the end of your life. It is important to share your concerns and fears with family, friends and your healthcare team. Please speak to a member of your healthcare team if you have any questions throughout the process.

## How will the Body Change?

### Pain

**As a patient:** As your body changes and disease/illness progresses, you may experience pain. Your healthcare team will work on making you comfortable through different methods such as repositioning, heating and cooling or massage, as well as with medication. It is important to recognize that people at end of life do not get addicted to medications, they need these medications to manage their pain. Remember that medications may need to be increased to continue to provide comfort. Do not be afraid to ask for medication if you are experiencing pain.

**As a Caregiver:** Closer to the end of life your person may not be able to speak, so knowing if they are in pain might be difficult. You can look for signs of: frowning, moaning, moving around or pulling away when touched as signs that they might be in pain. If you see that your person is in pain, explain what you are seeing to the healthcare team and ask for ways to reduce the pain.

### Changes in Appetite

The need for food and liquid decreases at end of life. A person may no longer feel the need to eat or drink. This is normal. If a person does eat, they may find that the food and fluid do not increase energy, weight or strength. A person's mouth may become dry. They may only want one bite of their favourite food.

### Skin

As death nears, a person's body begins to shut down. The blood naturally flows to the vital organs (heart or lungs for example) so a person's hands and legs might become cool to touch and purple in colour (mottled). The cool skin does not mean that a person is cold. The skin may also feel warm. This is because the body temperature may not be able to normalize, and does not mean that a person is too warm.

### Breathing

Breathing that becomes loud or that sounds wet is a natural process, and it is not necessarily a sign of pain or discomfort. These wet (gurgling) sounds are caused from the throat muscles beginning to relax, causing secretions to build up. A change of position may help, or there are medications that can be given to help dry up secretions. It is important to note that these sounds can be distressing to the people visiting the patient, but are not usually bothersome to your person. Talk to your healthcare team if you have questions.

During the last hours of life, your person may experience periods of

apnea – moments where they stop breathing for short periods of time and then start breathing again.

### Lack of energy and changes in mobility

As people get closer to end of life, their energy and ability to move by themselves decreases. They may need more help for their care needs and repositioning. They may feel very weak and eventually will have less energy to talk. Your healthcare team will provide support with repositioning and support with care needs.

### Mouth

Regular mouthcare is important at end of life as a person's mouth may become dry. Using water to do regular mouthcare, taking small sips of water or ice chips can be helpful and enjoyable for the person.

### Sleep

People that are at end of life will tire more easily and therefore it is important to engage them for important conversations when they are awake.

### Palliative Sedation

There are times where symptoms at end of life are challenging and cannot be managed well. Palliative sedation is a process where sleep is induced and maintained in a person who is very close to end of life, with the goal being to relieve suffering that is intolerable to the person.

It is important to be aware that not all of these changes will necessarily happen and there is no particular order that they may occur in.

## How will my emotions change?

It is common to have different emotions as you or your person nears death. Some examples of common emotions are:

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Confusion
- Embarrassment
- Feeling of loss
- Like you want to be alone

What to do?

- Share your feelings with each other
- Share stories and memories
- Talk to your healthcare team and Spiritual Care Provider
- Bring familiar/comforting items from home
- Ask questions
- For caregivers: Ensure you are taking time to rest, sleep, eat and drink, and take breaks away from the bedside

