

# Hospice Care

# End-of-Life Pocket Guide

Supporting Loved Ones  
in Their Final Hours



MaineHealth

In the final days of life, a person may experience noticeable changes in their body and behavior.

Knowing what to expect can help you feel more prepared and fully present as you support them through this time.

## **Emergency Contacts/Resources**

**MaineHealth CHANS Home Health & Hospice**

24/7

207-729-6782

**MaineHealth Home Health & Hospice**

24/7

207-284-4566



## What to Expect Physically

Our bodies undergo significant changes as we approach the end of life. These changes are natural and typically aren't uncomfortable for the patient. Symptoms include:

- Decreased appetite and thirst — the patient may go days without eating or drinking
- Changes in breathing, including shortness of breath, long pauses between breaths, gasps, and/or loud rattling sounds
- Wide, glossy eyes and open mouth, as muscles relax
- Increased fall risk
- Mottled, blue/gray skin
- Unresponsiveness
- Confusion
- Incontinence

## How to Comfort Someone Who is Actively Dying

You know you're loved one best. Consider their personality and preferences when deciding how best to support them. You may try:

- **Small acts of care:** Moisturizing their lips, repositioning their pillows, reading aloud, sharing memories, holding hands, and playing soft music or familiar sounds can all increase comfort.
- **Offer reassurance:** Phrases like, "You're not alone," "We love you," and "It's ok to rest now" support the patient and give them permission to let go.
- **Provide a clean space:** Remove clutter, refresh pillows, and replace incontinence pads as needed.



- **Adjust medication, when appropriate:** Many families will be equipped with comfort medications. Please work with your MaineHealth hospice nurse to develop a medication plan.

## Take Care of Yourself

Saying goodbye to a loved one is difficult, and providing end-of-life care can be exhausting — physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually.

Pay attention to your needs and take time to go on a walk, get a coffee, or make yourself a meal. You can't help others if you're running on empty.

## When to Call a MaineHealth Hospice Nurse

While MaineHealth hospice support is available 24/7, a nurse may not be onsite during your loved one's final hours. Call your hospice nurse if:

- You're concerned about your loved one's comfort
- You have questions about administering comfort medications
- You need additional physical, mental, or spiritual support
- Your loved one has passed



## After Death Occurs

- Call your MaineHealth hospice contact immediately after your loved one has passed. Do not call 911.

### Your MaineHealth hospice team can also:

- Support with funeral coordination and transportation of the body
- Provide ongoing bereavement support, including grief counseling, to help you during this difficult time
- Help with the removal of medical equipment and medications

### Other things to consider after a loved one has passed:

- Inform friends and loved ones
- Locate the will and identify the executor
- Close credit cards and bank accounts as necessary



## Notes

*Use this section to track your loved one's comfort medications, write down any final special wishes, or journal your thoughts and emotions.*



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