

Hospice Care

End-of-Life Pocket Guide

**Supporting Loved Ones
in Their Final Hours**

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.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Emergency Contacts/Resources

MaineHealth CHANS Home Health & Hospice

24/7

207-729-6782

MaineHealth Home Health & Hospice

24/7

207-284-4566