

# What happens when someone is dying?

**This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions you may have about the changes that happen when someone is close to death.**

The process of dying is unique to each person. It can last a few hours or several days. Please ask the nurse or doctor if you need more help or information.

Everyone is different, but in most cases there are common signs and changes that show a person may be close to death.

## 1. Less need for food and drink

- It is normal for a person who is dying not to feel like eating or drinking. When this happens it can be upsetting because we want to do everything to help those we care for.
- Eating and drinking becomes more of an effort. The person needs help to take sips of fluid. A drinking beaker or straw can make sipping fluid easier. Moistening the person's lips and tongue with water or oral gel helps keep them comfortable.
- A drip is occasionally used to give people fluids under the skin. As the process of dying continues the body does not need the same amount of fluid and cannot cope with it. Fluid from a drip can make breathlessness worse as it tends to build up in the lungs, and staff may advise that a drip is stopped.

## 2. Changes in breathing

- When someone is dying their need for oxygen may lessen and the way they breathe changes. People who have been breathless may feel less breathless at this time.
- As people get more unwell, their breathing may pause for a while and then start again. They use different muscles to breathe, which means their breathing will look different.
- Sometimes breathing can sound noisy or "rattling" because the person is no longer able to cough or clear their throat. This can sound distressing but is generally not upsetting for the person. Often changing the person's position can reduce the noise of breathing or an injection of medicine may be given.

## 3. Changes in how the person looks and behaves

- During the process of dying a person's skin may become pale and moist. Their hands and feet can feel very cold and sometimes look bluish in colour.
- Dying people often feel very tired and will sleep more. Even when they are awake, they may be drowsier than they have been. As people get more unwell they will be awake less and less. They may still be aware of the presence of family and friends so you can still talk to them.
- If you are worried about what is happening or have any questions, please ask. The staff are here to help you.