



Understanding and coping with dying

Information for patients and those close to them

Understanding and coping with dying

The last days or hours of life can be difficult and an emotional time for friends, families and carers. This leaflet aims to prepare you for what to expect and how the hospice team can support and provide care for you and your loved ones when this situation arises.

Caring for people at the end of their life is a privilege. We feel that a team approach offers people the best care, so we involve very experienced healthcare professionals, as well as Counsellors, Therapists and the Chaplaincy Team. We recognise that everyone involved is an important part of the caring team and we welcome your views. We hope that you feel able to speak to us about these.

The dying process is unique to every individual and so in

the hospice and community setting staff develop a plan of care for every patient individually.

These plans are developed with patients and carers to ensure that we prioritise the care that is important to the individual at that time. As the person's condition changes, these plans are reviewed to ensure that the needs of the individual are met. In the hospice setting, we call this the 'Priorities of Care at the end of life'.

We understand that this is a very sad and difficult time for all concerned. We hope this leaflet will answer any questions that you may have. We have highlighted some common features seen in someone's last days of life. If you have any questions the clinical team will be happy to answer these.

Reduced need for food and drink

We encourage and support our patients to take food and fluids by mouth for as long as possible but, as weakness increases, the effort to do this may be too much and the patient may not have the same desire or need for food and drink.

Stopping eating and drinking is a normal part of the dying process but can be really hard

to accept and as equally hard to observe for a loved one.

Healthcare professionals assess the hydration status routinely, and will discuss with you if medical intervention to maintain healthy hydration is necessary. Gently moistening the mouth with a damp sponge, ice cubes and applying lip balm may provide some comfort.



Breathing changes

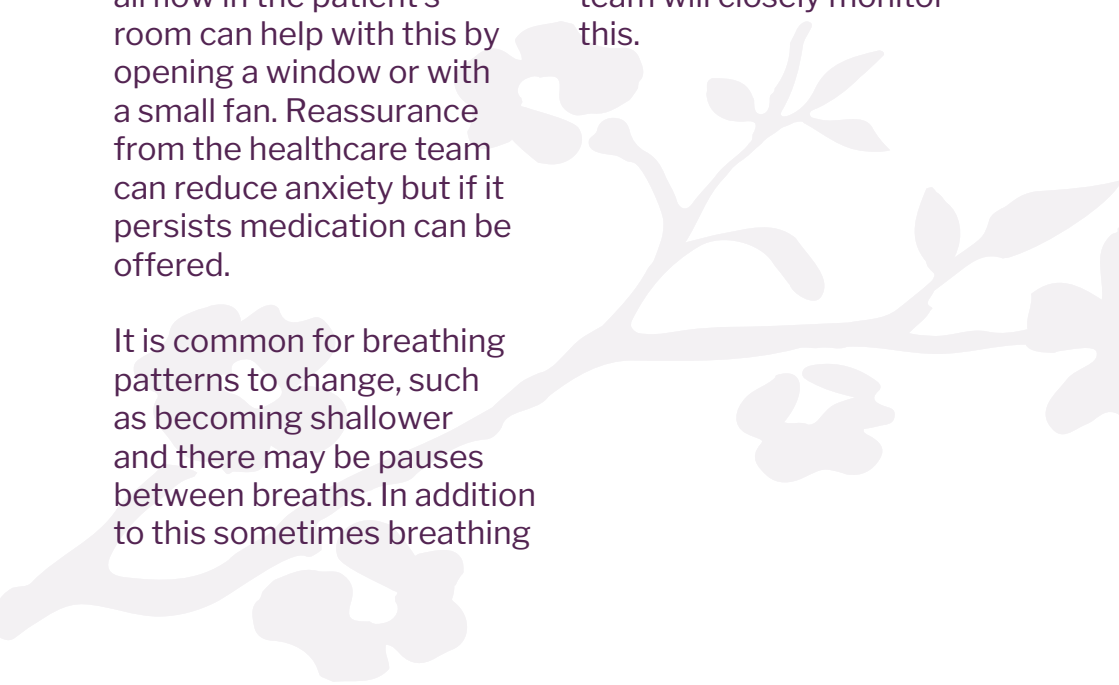
Towards the end of life, as people become less active, the demand for oxygen is reduced. This can actually make breathing easier and more peaceful, which can be quite comforting for those with breathing problems and those who suffer with breathlessness.

Alternatively, anxiety can make breathing more laboured. Increasing the airflow in the patient's room can help with this by opening a window or with a small fan. Reassurance from the healthcare team can reduce anxiety but if it persists medication can be offered.

It is common for breathing patterns to change, such as becoming shallower and there may be pauses between breaths. In addition to this sometimes breathing

can become noisy. Often this is heard as a rattling noise, which is caused by a build up of normal fluid in the chest or throat that can no longer be cleared effectively. Changes in position and medication may help with this.

Whilst noisy breathing may be upsetting to hear, it rarely causes distress for the patient and the healthcare team will closely monitor this.



The withdrawl process

What is know as the 'Withdrawing Process' is a natural process whereby your loved one will be sleeping more and will also be drowsier when awake. This is difficult when it is someone you care for but is a part of the natural dying process. When someone is sleeping or resting, they may still be able to hear you. We believe your presence provides reassurance and comfort.

At this time you could perhaps read a book or updates from the newspaper, or talk to them about their favourite sport. Sometimes it can help to play their favourite music.

At other times it is enough to just sit with your loved one and hold their hand.

All staff at the hospice are here to help and support families at this time. We are here to talk to you and reassure you about any worries.



Other services we provide

Counselling

At Woking & Sam Beare Hospices we often talk about the patient journey. Here our Counselling Team refers to the different emotions that people may be feeling, whether it's the patient, their families, friends or carers. Our team of specially trained professionals have many years' of experience and they provide a supportive and confidential environment.

At Woking & Sam Beare Hospices we recognise the importance of working with families to find the best ways to help children and teenagers come to terms with their own emotional distress. We can offer support on a one-to-one basis but we also run some special support groups just for children and teenagers. These are called Footsteps and Tommy D respectively.

Spiritual Care

Whatever your belief, we believe that the role of spiritual care at Woking & Sam Beare Hospices has an important part in providing comfort and support, at times that may be very difficult. Spirituality is a highly subjective and personal concept. For some people, their spirituality will be expressed in religious terms, for others it could be more about seeking solace and peace.



Social Work

Our social worker is here to help support our patients and their families, and offers a wide variety of support including:

- **Sourcing practical help at home**
- **Supporting planned discharges from the hospice**
- **Accessing other services**
- **Advice around debt or income maintenance**
- **Working with schools or employers**
- **Help with housing**
- **Advocacy**
- **Advice and support regarding wills and power of attorney**
- **Emotional listening support**



Your care Your choice

For more information

In-patients: 01483 881755

Woking Community Team: 01483 881755

Sam Beare Community Team: 01932 598385

24 hour advice line: 07760 407397

Woking Hospice

Goldsworth Park Centre,
Woking,
Surrey,
GU21 3LG
Tel: 01483 881750

Sam Beare Community Team

Weybridge
Tel: 01932 598385

To find out more please contact

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