

What do you do when someone has died?

You don't have to do anything straight away, so you can take your time and collect your thoughts.

Care of the person

If you are at home:

You may wish to straighten the person on their back with their head and chest slightly raised on pillows. Call your primary care provider such as the hospice or your district nurse for support.

If you are in the hospital, hospice or at an aged residential care facility:

Staff will usually wash the person, lay them in fresh clothing and bed linen and straighten their head and body. You may wish to help and there may be certain clothing or possessions that you wish to remain with the person.

Support for you

You may want the help of your spiritual support person at this time. You could call him or her for assistance.

You may want family, whānau or friends to be with you to say goodbye to the person and give you support.

Arrangements

If you are at home:

Arrangements need to be made for your GP to see the person and prepare the death certificate. It is not necessary to call the ambulance or police.

If you are in the hospital, hospice or at an aged residential care facility:

Staff will make arrangements for the Medical Officer/your GP to see the person to prepare the death certificate.

After death

There are many ways to celebrate a life. The person who has died may have previously indicated their wishes. This may be a ceremony at a Church, funeral home, marae, or at home. You may wish to contact a funeral director, chaplain, kuia, kuamatua, minister or priest. They will help you with all the arrangements. The funeral director does not need to take the person away immediately.

Although one journey may be finishing, the journey for you will continue.

As you face your loss, there will be a range of supports available to you.

This brochure has been adapted from a brochure developed by Arohanui Hospice, Palmerston North.

What to expect when someone is dying



This brochure describes some typical features of the process of dying.

It may help to reduce the anxiety about the unknown.

The dying process is unique to each person, but in most cases there are common characteristics or changes that help to indicate a person is dying.

Death usually comes gradually and peacefully, and there are many changes that signal life is coming to an end. Most changes that occur at this time are normal and do not need special treatment, hospitalisation, or professional help. If you are unsure about anything, please call the health professional supporting you.

Here are some of the changes that may occur when a person is dying.

Not eating and drinking

Eventually there will come a time when food and drink are neither wanted or needed. This can be hard to accept, but it is a physical sign that the person is not going to get better. Caring can be continued in other ways. Moistening the mouth may be all that is needed for comfort (ice chips and sucking on swabs of cool drink).

Change in awareness

As weakness increases, the person may spend more time in bed and have less interest in their surroundings. From a very sleepy state, they may lapse into unconsciousness. This may last for a very short time, or for several days.

Breathing

It is very common for the breathing patterns to change. There may be gaps of seconds or minutes between breaths, with the gaps getting longer.

Incontinence

Sometimes there is a loss of control of bowel and bladder. It will be important to discuss this with your health professional in order to get appropriate supplies.

Increased confusion and restlessness

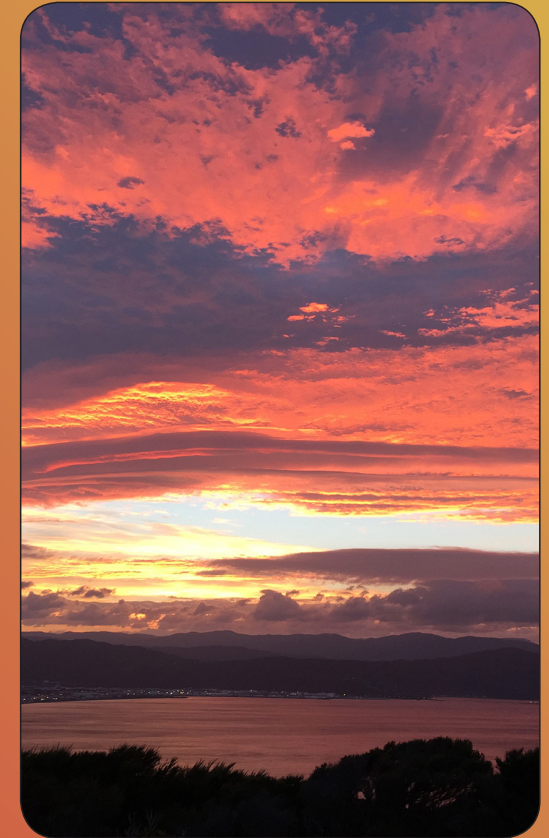
You may notice increased restlessness; the person pulling at bedclothes, trying to get out of bed when they are too weak to stand, muddled thinking and conversations. Try to reassure them by talking calmly, saying who you are, and holding their hand. Sometimes medication may be needed to calm and soothe their restlessness.

Changing colour/ temperature

You may notice the person's arms and legs feel cool and clammy, and possibly look patchy and darker in colour. This does not necessarily mean they are feeling cold.

How will you know the person has died?

- Breathing has stopped.
- No heartbeat present.
- There is no response when you touch them or talk loudly.
- Eyes are fixed on a certain spot, pupils are dilated, and eyelids may be open.
- Jaw relaxes and mouth stays open.
- Possible loss of control of bladder and bowel movement.



Try to reassure the person by talking calmly, saying who you are, and holding their hand

***Mā tō reo ia e mōhio koe,
puritia tōna ringa***