

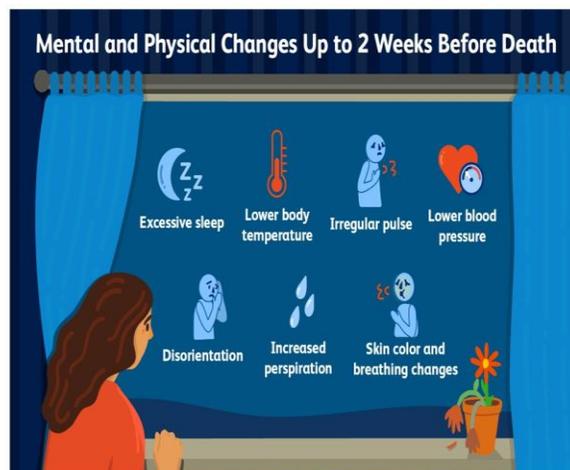
Basic Certificate in Palliative Care
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Week-10
Lecture 04: Facing Death: How to Help?

Hi, greetings from National Association of Palliative Care for AYUSH and Integrative Medicine. I am Doctor Piyush Gupta, Secretary and Principal Executive Officer of Cancer Aid Society and Secretary of National Association of Palliative Care for AYUSH and Integrative Medicine.

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Facing Death - How to Help



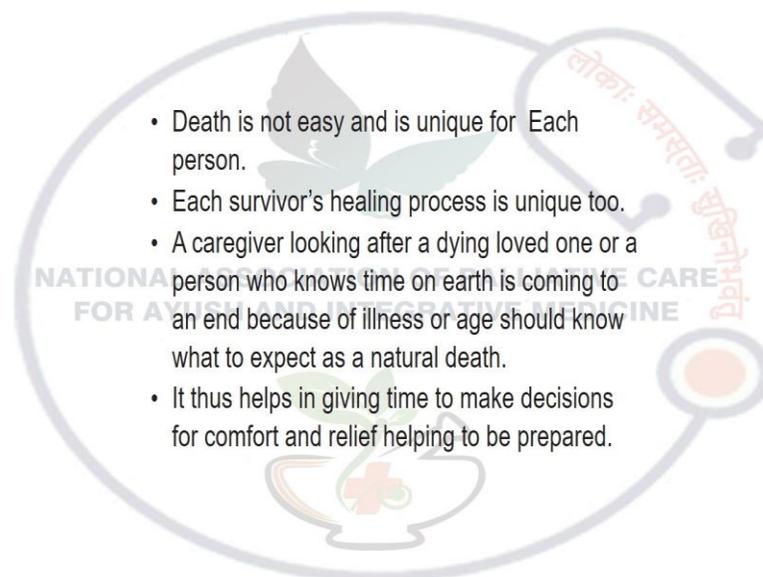
So, today we are going to discuss how to face death and how we can help the patients who are on death bed. So, what we see that there may be mental and physical changes two weeks prior to death and these can be excessive sleep, lower body temperature, irregular pulse, lower blood pressure, disorientation, increased perspiration and skin color and breathing changes.

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There are 11 signs of death and ways to help your loved ones could how you can help them on their death bed. They start sleeping more, the appetite decreases, they become less social, the vital signs are changing, decreased body waste, the skin is cool, muscle becomes weak, breathing is difficult, there is confusion, there is pain and they may start hallucinating.

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Death is not easy and is unique for each person. Each survivor's healing process is unique too. A caregiver looking after a dying loved one or a person who knows time on earth is coming to an end because of illness or age should know what to expect as a natural death. It thus helps in giving time to make decisions for comfort and relief helping to be prepared.

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1. Sleeping more

Several months before the end of life, a dying person may begin to sleep more than usual and body's metabolism falls. Without regular supply of energy, fatigue and tiredness increase.

How to help?

Let them sleep and help them find comfortable places to rest. Encourage them to get out of bed so they don't develop sores.

So, we can see that several months before the end of life a dying person may begin to sleep more than usual and body's metabolism goes down. Without regular supply of energy there may be fatigue, tiredness may increase.

How can we help? Let them sleep and help them find comfortable places to rest encouraging them to get out of bed so they don't develop sores because if they continue to lie for long durations then they may get pressure sores.

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2. Eating and drinking less

Energy needs decrease as one gets older along with reduced activities and daily tasks, food and drinks also reduce. People nearing death may not even eat their favourite foods. A few days before death one may stop eating or drinking entirely.

How to help?

Let them eat when they're hungry. Hydration is important, so let them frequently sip fluids in small quantity. When they stop drinking, Soak a washcloth with cool water and use it to pat their lips, keep the delicate skin around their lips moisturized with a lip balm.

Eating and drinking less would be there. So, energy need decreases as when gets older along with reduced activities and daily tasks. Food and drinks also reduce because of the less activity. People nearing death may not even eat their favorite foods. A few days before death one may stop eating or drinking entirely.

How to help? Let them eat when they are hungry. Hydration is important so let them frequently save fluids in a small quantity. When they stop drinking soak a wash cloth which cool water and use it to pat their lips. Keep the delicate skin around their hips moisturized with lip balm.

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3. Withdrawing from people

People who are dying withdraw from the activities and people they love. This is a natural reflection of changes in energy, as well as a desire to protect their final days.

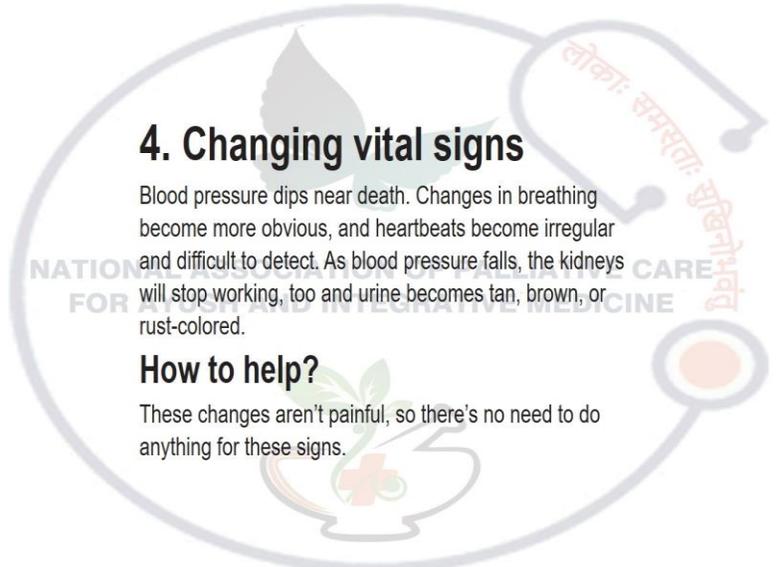
How to help?

Withdrawing doesn't mean they do not enjoy the company of people they love. Let friends and family visit without disturbing their routine. If they do not wish to see someone, it may not be due to their feeling about him but some people do not wish to let others see them dying, so they may isolate themselves in their last days.

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This is a natural reflection of changes in energy as well as desire to protect their final days. How can you help? Withdrawing doesn't mean they do not enjoy the company of people they love. Let friends and family visit without disturbing their routine. If they do not wish to see someone it may not be due to their feeling about him but some people do not wish to let others see them dying. So, they may isolate themselves in their last days.

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4. Changing vital signs

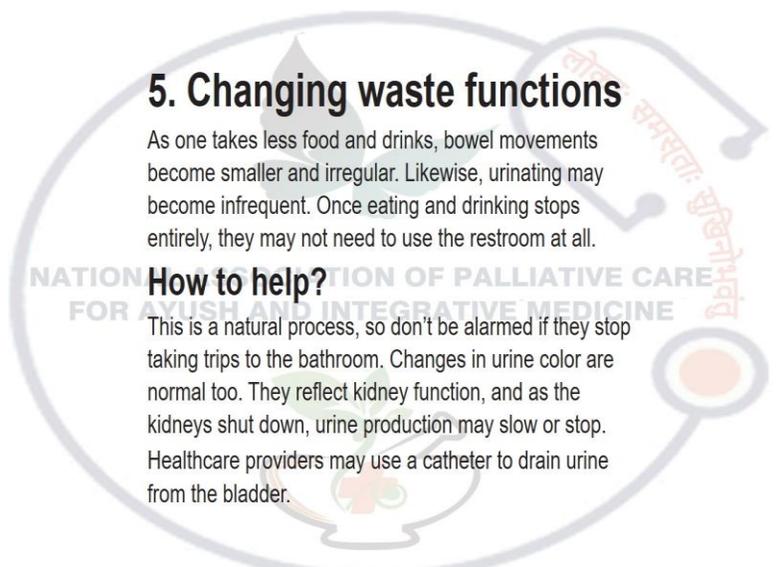
Blood pressure dips near death. Changes in breathing become more obvious, and heartbeats become irregular and difficult to detect. As blood pressure falls, the kidneys will stop working, too and urine becomes tan, brown, or rust-colored.

How to help?

These changes aren't painful, so there's no need to do anything for these signs.

Changing of vital signs would be there. Blood pressure dips near death. Changes in breathing become more obvious and heartbeats become irregular and difficult to detect. As blood pressure falls the kidneys will stop working too and urine becomes tan brown or rust colored. How to help? These changes aren't painful so there is no need to do anything for these signs.

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5. Changing waste functions

As one takes less food and drinks, bowel movements become smaller and irregular. Likewise, urinating may become infrequent. Once eating and drinking stops entirely, they may not need to use the restroom at all.

How to help?

This is a natural process, so don't be alarmed if they stop taking trips to the bathroom. Changes in urine color are normal too. They reflect kidney function, and as the kidneys shut down, urine production may slow or stop. Healthcare providers may use a catheter to drain urine from the bladder.

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6. Dropping body temperature

Blood circulation draws inward toward vital organs in the final days. That means blood circulation in places like hands, feet, and legs is reduced and skin and limbs feel cool to the touch. The skin appears pale and reduced circulation may cause skin blue-purple look.

How to help?

Even the skin or limbs may feel cool one may not be cold. If they are, a blanket or light covering may help keep them warm.

Dropping of body temperature because blood circulation draws inward and outward vital organs in the final days. That means blood circulation places like hands, feet and legs is reduced and skin and limbs feel cold to touch.

The skin appears pale, circulation is reduced and may cause skin blue purple look. How to help? Even the skin or limbs may feel cold one may not be cold at all. If they are a blanket or light covering may help to keep them warm.

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7. Weakening muscles

In the final days before death, muscles can become very weak. Simple tasks, like lifting a cup of water or turning over in bed, may become difficult.

How to help?

Make them as comfortable as possible. If they need to drink from a cup of water, position the cup near their mouth and insert a straw so they can more easily drink or spoon feed them. If they need to flip or turn in bed, gently help them move until they reach a comfortable spot. Put a folded bedsheet below their hips to help in moving.

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8. Breathing troubles

This is an alarming sign for many people as they sit with a loved one who's dying. These breathing fluctuations may include changes in breathing, sudden gasps for air, or long stretches of time between breaths.

How to help?

While laboured breathing may seem painful or problematic however the person isn't aware of what's happening. Some pain medications such as can make breathing easier. Oxygen concentrators are available in many places on moderate monthly rental and can be used.

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9. Increasing confusion

The brain remains very active during the dying phase however moments of confusion is common for a person who is dying. Some people may become restless and aggressive if they don't know where they are or what's happening.

How to help?

Be calm and speak quietly assuring you're there to take care. Make sure to introduce self before talking, and introduce everyone who sits with them.

Their brain is still working, even if it seems like they're asleep.

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What is increasing confusion? The brain remains very active during the dying phase. However moments of confusion is common for a person who is dying. Some people may become restless and aggressive if they don't know where they are or what's happening. How to help? Be calm and speak quietly assuring you are there to take care.

Make sure to introduce self before talking and introduce everyone who sits with them. The brain is still working even if it seems like they are asleep.

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10. Pain

The intensity of pain will likely increase as a person becomes nearer to death. It's not uncommon for a person to show visible signs that they're in pain.

These signs include grimacing, wincing, groaning, or scowling.

How to help?

Most pain can be treated, but this may require nursing care facility at home. Dying people may stop being able to swallow, so an intravenous (IV) line may be necessary to deliver fluids & pain medicine.

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11. Hallucinations

Dying people say they see long-gone loved ones in their final days. Hallucinations and visions of other places or people aren't uncommon either.

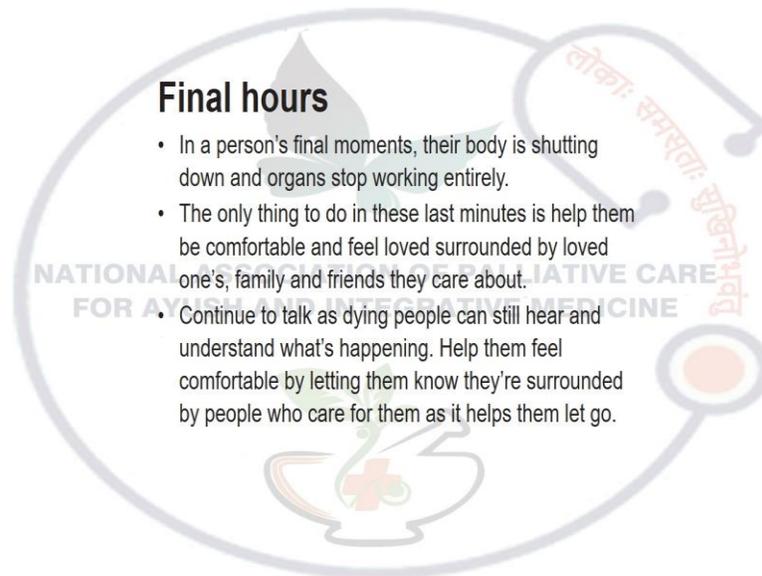
How to help?

While it may be upsetting, do not try to correct them as it will only cause confusion and frustration.

Ask questions to help them understand what they're seeing.

Hallucinations. Dying people say they see long gone loved ones in their final days. Hallucinations and visions of other places or people aren't uncommon is either. How to help? While it may be upsetting, do not try to correct them as it will only cause confusion and frustration. Ask questions to help them understand what they are seeing.

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In the final hours, in the person's final moments, their body is shutting down and organs stop working entirely.

The only thing to do in these last minutes is help them to be comfortable. And feel loved, surrounded by loved ones, family and friends they care about. Continue to talk as dying people can still hear and understand what's happening. Help them feel comfortable by letting them know they are surrounded by people who care for them as it perhaps helps them let go.

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Signs of death

Heart rate monitor can display when the heart stops indicating death.

If not, look for other signs of death:

- no pulse
- no breathing
- relaxed muscles
- fixed eyes
- no response
- a bowel or bladder release
- partially shut eyelids

A person's natural death isn't an emergency, so do not panic.

Signs of death. Heart rate monitor can display when the heart stops indicating death. If not look for other signs of death. No pulse, no breathing, relaxed muscles, fixed eyes, no response, a bowel or bladder release, partially shut eyelids. A person's natural death isn't an emergency. So do not panic.

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Finding support

- Seek out support from friends and family, or seek professional help.
- Religious groups may offer counselling too.
- Grief is different for every person, so do not judge progress by that of another person.
- Find a group that feels comfortable and welcoming.

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Thank You

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Some references if you are interested in further reading. Thank you.