

Common Symptoms that can present with serious or terminal illness and at end of life include:

Pain	Loss of Appetite
Shortness of breath	Confusion
Fevers	Agitation
Nausea/Vomiting	Restlessness/anxiety
Excessive Oral Secretions	Sleep Disturbance
Constipation	Spiritual Distress

Note that not all symptoms will be present for all individuals at the end of life, nor will they occur in a particular sequence. The body prepares itself for death in very wise and natural ways. Below are a list of some of the signs or symptoms that can manifest when a person is nearing end of life, as well as the non-medical comfort measures that can be utilized by those caring for them.

comfort measures:

Sign or Symptom: Pain

- Repositioning, light massage, or soft music can help to soothe the person and ease pain
- Guided imagery can be helpful to calm and refocus person

Sign or Symptom: Difficulty Breathing

- Assist to upright position, when possible, or head slightly elevated with pillows
- Ambient airflow: a fan can provide air movement and sense of improved breathing
- Place a cool cloth over the person's neck and/or forehead
- Pursed-lip breathing can be helpful: inhale like smelling a flower, exhale like blowing out a candle
- Stay calm and match your breathing to the person's to promote connection and relaxation
- Guided imagery can be helpful to calm and refocus person

Sign or Symptom: Nausea/Vomiting

- Remove any strong odors, especially food
- Suggest small intake of fluids or ice chips.

Sign or Symptom: Change in Circulation

- Gently massage cold extremities (feet and hands)
- Provide blankets as needed and support extremities with soft pillows.

Sign or Symptom: Food or Fluid Decrease:

- Do not push someone to eat. Offer small amounts of food they enjoy.
- To optimize swallowing, raise the head of the bed or have the person sit upright.



NON MEDICAL SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT

Sign or Symptom: Dry Mouth/Sores:

- Encourage person to rinse mouth frequently with homemade salt/baking soda mouthwash.
- Place a moist cloth in bowl in freezer and then place frozen cloth between person's lips so they can suck on it.
- Keep lips moist with lip balm and their mouth clean and moist with a soft damp cloth.

Sign or Symptom: Fear and/or Anxiety

Recognize that fear of the unknown or fear of pain/suffering are common for people at the end of life. Provide a safe space for processing for the dying person and show up in a present, calm manner. If appropriate, revisit the potential sources of spiritual pain and suffering and give the person time to share (as a reminder, these are: Meaning, Forgiveness, Relatedness and Hope)

Sign or Symptom: Disruption in Sleep Cycles:

-Encourage daytime activity, when possible, rather than sleeping and/or extended naps. Encourage minimal activity before going to bed at night. Relaxing music or the intake of warm drinks can be helpful to calm the body. If someone is sleeping more, let them rest and make your presence known by gently holding their hand and speaking softly and naturally. Never assume that a person cannot hear you.

USEFUL REMINDERS, QUOTES AND PHRASES

Reminders as you Companion

- "The heart of our supportive strength sources from our ability to show up and companion one another." -Dr. Alan Wolfelt
- All we have to do is be our "being"
- It is in the context of relationship that healing happens
- HOPE = Hearing Other People's Experiences
- "Death is a social event with a medical component, not a medical event with a social component." -Allan Kellehear

Patient Dignity Question

As companions we can provide person-centered, dignity-conserving care by asking:
"What do I need to know about you as a person to take the best care of you that I can?"

Helpful Phrase When Companionship

- Say "Tell me more...."
- Ask "What else....?"
- Protect the sacred silence by asking yourself "WAIT (Why Am I Talking?)"
- Ask open-ended questions
- Leave yourself and your agenda at the door: Meet the one you are companionship where they are, how they are, provide what is needed at the time
- Watch your tendency to be the fixer, comparer, one who pities
- Never bring your private beliefs or respond with: 'This is what you need to do. '

USING THE RELIEVER MNEMONIC

WHEN SUPPORTING PEOPLE AROUND PREPARATORY GRIEF, CONSIDER USING THE BELOW MNEMONIC AS A WAY TO GUIDE YOUR CONVERSATIONS (ADAPTED FROM THE ARIZONA CENTER ON AGING)

- **REFLECT** BY ACKNOWLEDGING THEIR EMOTIONS. SAY SOMETHING LIKE "I CAN SEE THAT YOU ARE SAD."
- **EMPATHIZE** BY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE "I KNOW THIS IS HARD FOR YOU."
- **LEAD** BY EXPLORING THEIR CONCERNS WITH QUESTIONS LIKE "WHAT CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT HOW OTHERS WILL COPE AFTER YOU ARE GONE?"
- **IMPROVISE** BY KEEPING IN MIND THAT EVERY PERSON WILL EXPERIENCE PREPARATORY GRIEF IN AN INDIVIDUAL MANNER. SOME PEOPLE MAY BE MORE OPEN THAN OTHERS IN DISCUSSING THEIR GRIEF.
- **EDUCATE** BY EXPLAINING THE GRIEF PROCESS AND THE EMOTIONS THAT ACCOMPANY IT.
- **VALIDATE** THEIR EXPERIENCE, BY REMINDING THEM THAT THEIR GRIEF IS COMPLETELY NORMAL.
- **RECALL** BY HELPING THEM CELEBRATE THE LIFE THEY HAVE LIVED, AND RECOGNIZE ANY TASKS THEY STILL WANT TO COMPLETE.