



WOODLANDS HOSPICE

Coping with dying

How we can help

This is likely to be a difficult and painful time for you when you are losing someone you love or have cared for. You may find it hard to know what to say, how to help or what to do.

Nurses, doctors and other staff are there to help you to work through your worries and concerns and to offer you care and support.

We hope that you will come and talk to us if you have worries or concerns.

Although we cannot experience your personal feelings, we understand that this is a time of sorrow. We would like to help you in any way we can.

Please ask to speak to the Family Support Worker, your Key Worker, the Hospice at Home Coordinator or the Nurse in Charge of the Inpatient Unit.

Tel: **0151 529 2299**

If you would like to help contribute towards the support we give every day at Woodlands Hospice, there are many ways you can help.

Find out more on our website or call the Fundraising Team on 0151 529 2631



Woodlands Hospice Charitable Trust,
AUH Campus, Longmoor Lane, Liverpool L9 7LA
Tel: 0151 529 2299
www.woodlandshospice.org Charity No. 1048934

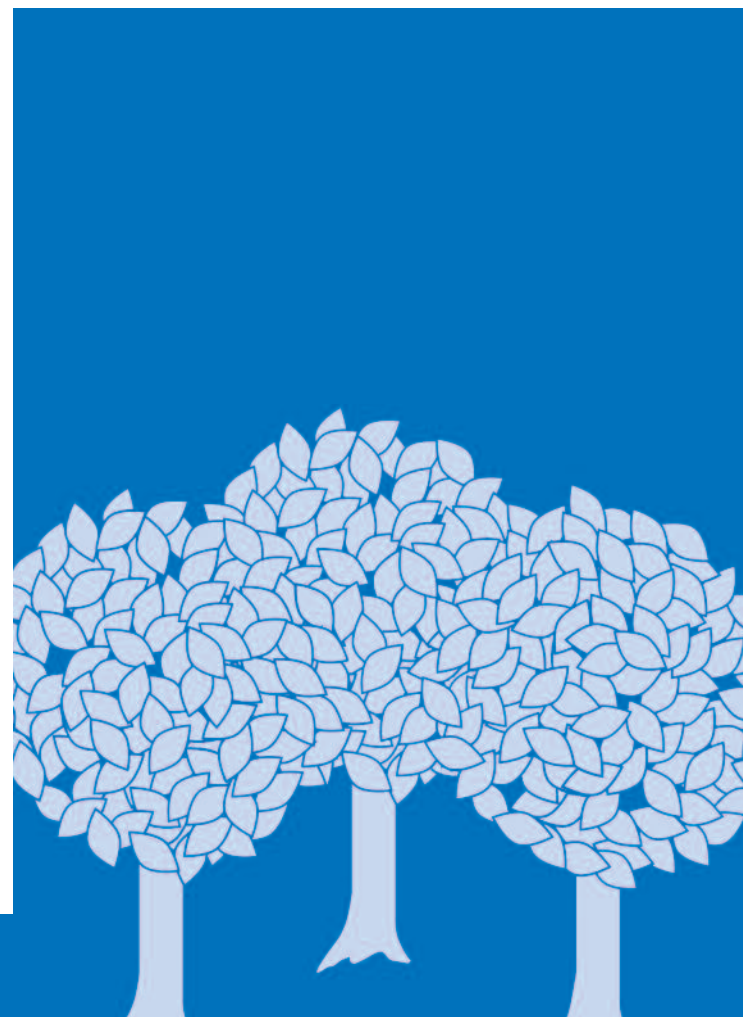
Death and dying is something we may need to contemplate at some point in our lives, but perhaps we don't know what to expect when we are faced with the death of someone close to us.

Everyone is different, but in most cases there are common signs and changes that show us a person may be close to death. This leaflet describes some of the typical features of the process of dying in order to help reduce some of the fear that may be associated with the unknown.

It anticipates some of the questions you may want to ask about what is happening and why, and will hopefully encourage you to ask for further help or information from the team looking after your loved one.

The signs that someone is dying broadly fall into four categories:

- Diminished need for food and drink.
- Withdrawing from the world.
- Changes in breathing.
- Changes which occur when death is imminent.



Coping with dying



Diminished need for food and drink

When someone is beginning to die their need for food and drink reduces. The body's metabolism, i.e. the way it breaks down food and drink and absorbs it, slows down. Indeed the body may struggle to digest food and fluid and there may be a natural tendency for a person in the dying phase to want less food and drink because of this. Sometimes a few sips are all a person will take. However, be assured that your relative/friend will be supported to take food and fluids by mouth for as long as they are able to. If the mouth appears dry this is not a sign of dehydration. Regular mouth care and gently moistening the mouth will give comfort and is often all that is required in this phase.

It can be hard to accept these changes, even when you know that the person is dying, as it is a physical sign that they are not going to get better. Nevertheless you can show that you still care about your loved one by spending time with them

and comforting them through your presence.

Withdrawing from the world

For most this is a gradual process. A dying person may spend more and more time asleep and even when they are awake they may be drowsy and generally less interested in what is going on around them.

Changes in breathing

Similar to the reduced need for food and fluids, the body also has a reduced demand for oxygen in the dying phase. This may be comforting for people who have suffered from breathlessness due to their illness.

Breathing problems can be made worse by feelings of anxiety. Knowing that someone is close at hand can be a real help in this situation and prevent or alleviate breathlessness related to anxiety. Just sitting and holding your

loved ones hand can make a lot of difference and, because someone who is unconscious will still be able to hear you, you may find it helpful to talk to your loved one or make comforting sounds (even though they may not respond).

Sometimes in the last hours of life there can be a noisy rattle to the breathing. This is due to a pooling of saliva and mucus on the chest, which the person is no longer able to cough up. Medication may be used to try to reduce this. Change of position and occasionally even gentle suction by nursing staff can also help. It is important to remember in this situation that the noisy breathing can be upsetting for the carers, but it does not tend to distress the dying person.

Changes which occur when death is imminent

When death is imminent (within minutes or hours) the level of consciousness may drop further. The person may lapse into unconsciousness and remain in this state

for some time. The breathing pattern may change and become more irregular. Periods of more shallow breathing may alternate with periods of deeper or sighing breathing. Increasingly long pauses between breaths may also start to appear. Again this is not a sign of distress in the dying person, but part of the natural process.

Some people may become agitated as death approaches. If this is the case staff on the ward will talk to you about it, assess the patient and make sure that this is not due to pain or other uncontrolled symptoms. If these symptoms are present then appropriate medication will be administered by the nursing staff. If they are not present, or are well controlled, staff may administer sedative medication to appropriately alleviate the agitation.

The skin may become pale and moist and slightly cool before death.

Most people do not rouse from sleep and die quite comfortably.