

2–3 Days Before Dying

In the final days of life, the active dying phase often begins. Physical changes may become more pronounced and can be emotionally difficult for families to witness.

Common Changes

- Minimal responsiveness or unresponsiveness
- Cool, bluish hands or feet
- Irregular breathing or pauses in breathing (apnea)
- Noisy breathing or secretions ('death rattle')
- Decreased urine output
- Inability to fully close the eyes

What You Can Do

- Keep the patient warm and comfortable
- Continue gentle mouth care
- Use pillows and repositioning for comfort
- Use medications for pain or breathing distress as directed
- Provide calm presence and reassurance

Important Understanding

- Changes in breathing and circulation are expected
- Noisy breathing is often more distressing to family than to the patient
- The hospice team can help guide comfort measures during this time

This educational material is intended to support caregivers and families. Always discuss concerns or sudden changes with your hospice team.