



Comfort Care at the End

The last days are about presence and comfort. These are some things you can do to make your loved one as peaceful as possible and to help you get through this time.

Positioning and Temperature

- Unless there is an injury preventing it, change position every few hours to prevent pressure sores and ease discomfort. Use pillows between the knees and behind the back.
- Keep the room temperature comfortable, as the end-stage can cause changes in body temperature regulation. A soft blanket if you see shivering, or a fan if you see sweating.
- Keep your loved one's head elevated slightly unless otherwise directed by their care team, as it can ease their breathing and ability to swallow.

Pain and Agitation

- Comfort medications are appropriate, so if hospice has prescribed medications for pain or agitation, use them as directed. If your loved one seems uncomfortable after a dose, don't hesitate to call the hospice nurse.
- Watch for signs of pain: grimacing, restlessness, rapid breathing, or clenching, and let hospice know what you're seeing.
- Gentle touch, soft music, and a calm environment can all have a soothing effect.

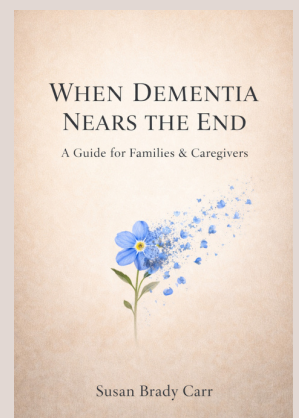
Mouth and Skin Care

- Keep the mouth moist. Use foam swabs to gently clean the mouth. Lip balm is also really helpful during this time, as chapped lips can be very uncomfortable.
- Use a soft, damp cloth and a gentle touch to wipe the skin, as softer textures are less irritating to fragile skin. A silk pillowcase or soft cotton sheets help to reduce friction, especially if your loved one is restless.

Presence and Communication

- Your loved one may not respond verbally, but hearing and feeling are often the last senses to go, so speak normally and close to their ear.
- Explain what you're doing, as sudden touches can cause a startle reflex.
- Play their favorite music or voice recordings of family members.
- Hold their hand, stroke their forehead (Vagal stroke), or sit quietly beside them.

Your presence is felt, even when there are no words.





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Things that bring comfort

- A favorite blanket or soft sweater.
- A small warm-toned lamp or battery-operated candles.
- A diffuser with lavender or vanilla, or a cotton ball with their favorite scent.
- Familiar photos or objects on a bedside table.

When to reach out for help

Many caregivers hesitate to ask for help. Since you've been handling things for months, or even years, watching and waiting seem counterproductive. But that's all you need to be doing right now, it's enough.

Reach out if:

- The breathing or agitation is so distressing you can't stay in the room.
- You're seeing physical changes that frighten or confuse you.
- You're alone with your loved one and don't feel safe managing their care.
- A medication dose didn't work, or you're afraid to give another.
- You're overwhelmed and feel like you're at your breaking point.

***The hospice team is there for you as much as they are for your loved one.
The nurse, social worker, and chaplain exist to support you, so lean on them.
You don't have to do this alone.***

