

About end of life care

Life expectancy has almost doubled in the last 100 years and more people are living longer with serious illnesses, with the highest proportion of deaths occurring in people over 65.

End of life care is support for people who are approaching death to enable them to live the remainder of their life with dignity and as well as possible up until the day they die. It also involves support for family, friends or carers.

End of life care includes palliative care. If a person has an incurable illness, palliative care will help them to be as comfortable as possible by relieving pain and other distressing symptoms, while providing psychological, social and spiritual support not only for the individual but also for their family or carers. This is called a holistic approach to care, as it deals with the 'whole' person rather than just one aspect of their care.

When does end of life care begin?

End of life care may last a few days, months or years and begins once an individual needs it and will then continue for as long as it is required. For example end of life care could begin:

- within 12 months for general frailty and/or co-existing conditions
- within a few months or days if it is an existing condition or there is a risk of dying from a sudden crisis in their condition
- within a few hours if it is a life-threatening acute condition caused by sudden catastrophic event, such as an accident or stroke

Who can provide end of life care?

Many professionals can be involved in providing end of life care, depending on a person's needs. Hospital doctors, nurses, GP, community nurses and hospice staff might all be involved, as well as social services, religious ministers, physiotherapists and complementary therapists.


Most hospitals have specialist palliative care teams who co-ordinate all these services. Patients will have the right to choose where they want to receive care and where they want to die.

Talking about End of Life

In our society talking about end of life, death and dying can be a taboo subject. Having those conversations can understandably be difficult and emotional and so they are often avoided.

Talking openly with professionals and loved ones provides opportunities to make our wishes known, be involved in important decision making, receive emotional and spiritual support and to put our affairs in order. This also helps us to make the most of the time we have to resolve any outstanding issues whether practical or interpersonal and to think about the legacy we leave behind.

For more information on how to have these difficult conversations visit:

-  [Dying Matters website](#)
- [Age UK: Before you go guide](#)

Other end of life, death and dying factsheets which may be of interest

Factsheet 1: About end of life care ▶	Factsheet 4: Care in the final days ▶
Factsheet 2: Planning ahead ▶	Factsheet 5: After death ▶
Factsheet 3: Supportive care for end of life ▶	Factsheet 6: Bereavement support ▶