

# Noisy breathing at the end of life

When people are dying it is common for them to become weaker and less conscious. This makes it difficult to cough or swallow, and clear saliva from their mouth or secretions (mucus) from their throat and chest. This can cause the noisy or rattly breathing that you may hear. Some people worry that the person sounds like they are choking but this is not the case. Noisy breathing is a normal and common event and how long this goes on for can vary from hours to days.

## ***Is noisy breathing upsetting for the person?***

No, as most people are less conscious they will most likely not be aware of their noisy breathing (like snoring). It can still be upsetting and worrying for others.

## ***What can be done?***

Seek support and guidance from the palliative care team as needed. They may talk to you about:

- Repositioning to help shift or move the secretions and reduce the breathing noise.
- Keeping the person's mouth moist and comfortable with swabs as directed by the palliative care team.

Sometimes the doctor will prescribe medicines to help dry up the secretions. These medicines may not always work, but we will discuss whether and when to start medicines with you.

## ***General advice:***

- You can help with practical things, but sometimes just being there is enough.
- Remember to look after yourself as best you can.
- You may find comfort in having supportive people with you during this time.
- Background noise such as a fan, music or the television, may distract from the sound of the noisy breathing.
- Please ask the palliative care team if you have any questions.



