

# Palliative care

Unfortunately, not all cancers can be cured. People with incurable cancer require specialised care, which is determined by the patient's needs. This is known as palliative care.

Palliative care is person and family-centred care that aims to help people with an active, progressive, life-limiting or terminal illness live as fully and as comfortably as possible. Care focuses on comfort, quality of life and the patient's total wellbeing and is appropriate at any time during the cancer journey. It is different to end-of-life care.

Palliative care can play an important role after diagnosis, during and after treatment, and to help alleviate symptoms. It can be provided alongside other treatments or it may become the focus of care.

It can also help families and caregivers make decisions that allow the patient to work toward their healthcare goals. These goals may include the hope to prolong life, live as well as possible or encourage peace and dignity throughout illness and at the end of life.

Recent studies show that people who have early palliative care lived longer, with fewer symptoms and a better quality of life than patients who did not have palliative care.

## Who provides palliative care?

Your palliative care team may involve different health specialists who work together, such as:

- doctors and nurses
- oncologist and other medical specialists
- palliative care specialists and nurse practitioners
- allied health practitioners (e.g. physiotherapists and speech pathologists)
- psychologists
- hospice organisations

## What services are offered under palliative care?

Palliative care identifies and treats symptoms that may be physical, emotional, spiritual or social. It can be delivered anywhere, including in your home, in a hospital or nursing home, through outpatient care or in another setting. Because palliative care is based on individual needs, services offered will differ. They may include:

- relief of pain and other symptoms (e.g. vomiting, shortness of breath)
- emotional, psychological and spiritual support
- equipment needed to enable care at home
- support to enable families to talk together about sensitive issues
- links to other services such as home help and financial support
- support for people to meet cultural obligations
- counselling and grief support
- referrals to respite care services

Palliative care is a family-centred model of care, meaning that family and carers can also receive practical and emotional support.

## End-of-life care

End-of-life care is an important part of palliative care. It is provided in the last few weeks of life when a person with a life-limiting illness is rapidly approaching death. It is appropriate for people of any age.

During this phase of palliative care, patients and carers have higher needs, so it is essential that quality, coordinated care is delivered. End-of-life care covers the terminal phase (when the patient is recognised as imminently dying), death and bereavement care.

## How can I access palliative care?

Palliative care is for people of any age who have been diagnosed with a serious illness that can't be cured. When you begin palliative care will depend upon your illness and how well you feel, emotionally and physically. Speak to your doctor or treatment team for further information about the type of care you require and how you can access it.

## Questions to ask

When discussing palliative care with your doctor, you may like to prepare questions such as:

- How is my illness likely to progress? Will I be in pain?
- Would palliative care help me and/or my family?
- What type of care or support service would you recommend?
- What medical professionals would be in my palliative care team?
- Where can I have this care?
- Do I require any special equipment for me to have care in my home?
- Can I be moved to a hospital or hospice if I need to?

## Where to find out more

For more information about accessing palliative care services, and pain and symptom management, speak to your healthcare team or contact our Specialist Nurse Support Team on **1300 881 698** or **support@pancare.org.au**.

This fact sheet is produced with the assistance of Palliative Care Australia (PCA), the national peak body for palliative care. PCA represents those who work towards high-quality palliative care for all Australians who need it. Working closely with consumers, our member organisations and the palliative care workforce, PCA aims to improve access to and promote palliative care.

**[www.palliativecare.org.au](http://www.palliativecare.org.au)**



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