

Pain Management at End of Life

The process of pain management does not change when a resident is coming to the end of their life, but pain management goals do change. A palliative care approach aims to improve comfort and function and address the psychological, spiritual and social needs of residents with life limiting and irreversible illness, whilst respecting autonomy, dignity and choice¹. Advanced Care Planning is an important aspect of this process by promoting conversations in a safe and sensitive manner to guide and document end-of-life care. It is necessary to have clear and respectful conversations with both the resident and their families to understand the residents' wishes and thus determine the most appropriate pain management approach in their final days.

End-of-life care is focused on the relief of pain and suffering in the last days or weeks of life¹. Residents, families, and aged care staff play a key role in noticing day-to-day changes that may herald end of life.

Signs and symptoms indicating a resident is likely to be approaching their last days of life include²:

- Incontinence
- More difficulty swallowing
- Unwilling or unable to take food, fluids or oral medications
- Profound weakness
- Becoming restless, agitated or confused
- Requiring more frequent interventions or bed-centred care
- Experiencing rapid day-to-day deterioration that is not reversible
- Becoming semi-conscious with lapses into unconsciousness
- Changes in breathing patterns

Anticipatory prescribing and access to medication that may be needed to relieve pain and suffering at the end of life is key. See the Printable Resources from *Pain in Residential Aged Care Facilities: Management Strategies, 2nd Edition* for a summary on use of analgesics at the end of life stage.

If needed, further assistance can be sought through:

- Referral to local palliative care service
- Contact Advanced Care Planning advisory line
- Palliaged: <https://www.palliaged.com.au/tabid/4716/Default.aspx>

¹ Refer to Chapter 8 of *Pain in Residential Aged Care Facilities: Management Strategies, 2nd Edition* for comprehensive information about pain at the end of life.

² Reproduced from Table 22 from *Pain in Residential Aged Care Facilities: Management Strategies, 2nd Edition*.
