

Accompanying a loved one who requests medical aid in dying



A loved one will soon receive medical aid in dying. You've been invited to accompany them closely. The following information can guide you in this role.

How can I support my loved one until the end of their life?

Most important of all is undoubtedly the listening ear, the warmth, and the compassion you can offer your loved one. Respect for their choices, as well. This support can facilitate their transition into death and ease your grief.

More practically, you can ask your loved one what their last wishes are. It can be soothing for them to talk about it. You can also find out what ritual they would like for the end of their life.

What is an end-of-life ritual?

It's an intimate moment with your loved one. This time allows you to experience together the emotions you both feel as their death approaches and to say goodbye. The ritual can take several forms, for example:

- reading messages from loved ones
- reading philosophical or sacred texts
- listening to beloved music
- looking at photos or significant objects near at hand
- sharing a favourite food or drink



We can help you organize rituals. Don't hesitate to talk with us about it.

What can I expect if I'm present when my loved one is receiving medical aid in dying?

Medical aid in dying results in a peaceful death, during sleep. The drugs used don't cause any pain or suffering.

The doctor will inject the medications through a small tube (catheter) into a vein. This takes a total of 5 to 10 minutes.

Here is the role of each medication:

- The first decreases anxiety and leads to light sleep.
- The second leads to deep sleep. There may be snoring and the mouth may open.
- The third slows down and then stops breathing, which quickly leads to death.

The doctor stays until the death.

Will my loved one be able to hear me and feel my presence while sleeping?

We don't know if they'll still be able to hear. However, we know that hearing is the last sense to linger before death. Don't hesitate to talk to them in a soft voice while they're asleep. You can also help them feel your presence by sitting close to them and holding their hand.

Our advice for the day of the care

- If at any time you don't feel comfortable in the room, don't hesitate to go out.
- Remember to eat a little, even if you're not hungry.
- Don't forget to take your usual medications. Also bring those you take only when needed, such as for anxiety or pain.
- If you need help because of a disability or a health condition, let us know.
- If possible, have someone accompany you on your return home. Your attention will be impaired.



Find help and a listening ear

Accompanying a loved one during medical aid in dying often brings up a lot of emotions: sorrow, anger, guilt, helplessness, relief, gratitude... Knowing the date of death can also be difficult. Don't hesitate to talk about what you're going through with family and friends.



If needed, we can refer you to a spiritual care worker, a psychologist, or a social worker.

What will happen after the death?

If medical aid in dying is provided at the CHUM, the room will be available for you to pay your respects and receive visits for another 4 hours. We'll be careful not to disturb you.

When you leave, be sure to take all of your loved one's jewelry, clothes, and other items. Anything left in the room will be donated to the CHUM's Volunteer Service.

Documents will need to be completed before you leave. We'll help you with that, if needed.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

You can call on any member of your loved one's care team.

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USEFUL RESOURCES

For more information on medical aid in dying:

chumontreal.qc.ca

Dying with Dignity Canada:

dyingwithdignity.ca/en/

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online. chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal chumontreal.qc.ca

