

Palliative care

The essential facts

What is palliative care?

Palliative care relieves suffering and improves quality of life for patients and families dealing with any type of life-threatening illness.



If you, a relative or a friend is diagnosed with a serious illness like heart failure, cancer or a respiratory disease, palliative care helps people live a more active, fulfilling and comfortable life.

Palliative care focusses on care that makes everyday life better, like relieving pain, helping reduce breathlessness, supporting people through the anxiety of living with a serious condition, and making practical plans for the future.

Palliative care is about helping people maintain quality of life through practical help, physical care, medicines, and spiritual and emotional support.



Palliative care can help ensure that life remains meaningful and fulfilling despite living with a serious illness. It does this through:

practical help, for example, some families may need support with adapting their homes to support a person with a serious health problem;

physical care: looking after the needs of the body, through mobility aids and exercises, for instance;

medicines: medicines can be used to help with symptoms like pain, vomiting, breathlessness, anxiety, depression and confusion;

spiritual support: helping people meet their spiritual needs, such as feeling a sense of belonging, repairing relationships and searching for meaning;

emotional support: helping people and their families through the complex emotional challenges of living with a serious illness.

Who is palliative care for?

Palliative care is for children and adults. It is not only about the end of life. It can be considered early in a disease to help improve troubling symptoms such as pain, breathlessness, or vomiting.



People of any age, including children, can develop a serious health condition and may require palliative care.

Palliative care provides support, not only to the patient, but also to the patient's family and carers. It recognizes that a serious illness will have an impact on the whole family.

People with many different health problems may need palliative care, especially if they are expected to deteriorate over time. This includes serious conditions such as cancers, dementia, heart disease, lung diseases, HIV/AIDS, neurological conditions, liver diseases and kidney disease.

Palliative care does not replace your usual care: it can be provided alongside regular medical care.

Palliative care can be made affordable for everyone in every country. Despite this, only about 1 in 10 of the people who need care receive it.



Palliative care is needed by people across the whole world, but not all countries currently have palliative care services in place. This needs to change.

Palliative care is not a luxury, it is essential. It should be available and affordable to each and every person who needs it.

How is palliative care provided?

Palliative care teams include doctors, nurses, support workers, pharmacists, social workers, physiotherapists and volunteers all working together with the patient and their family.



Palliative care can be provided in a variety of ways. A whole range of people are involved in palliative care teams such as social workers, physiotherapists, chaplains, doctors, nurses and volunteers.

For some people, palliative care is best provided in their own community at a nearby clinic, by their usual nurse or doctor.

For other people palliative care is best provided at home. This may mean relatives, friends or volunteers providing most of the care, with visits from health care workers for support and training.

Some people require more specialized palliative care services. These may be provided in a hospice, in a hospital or community setting by a specialist team.

For more information on palliative care visit:

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/palliative-care>