

After Death — The First 48 Hours

When the moment comes, there is no rush. Here is a step-by-step guide for what happens next — and what you do NOT need to do right away.

Phase 1: Right Now — The first minutes

- There is no rush. Take as long as you need. Sit with them. Hold their hand. Pray. Be still. Nothing needs to happen immediately.
- Call your hospice number. Tell them your loved one has died. A nurse will come to the home to pronounce death and handle the medical details.

IMPORTANT

Do NOT call 911. Paramedics are legally required to attempt resuscitation. The hospice nurse handles everything.

- Call close family members who want to be there. Everyone else can wait.
- You can bathe and dress them if you wish. Some families find this meaningful. It is not required — the funeral home can do it.

Phase 2: First Few Hours — After the nurse visits

- The hospice nurse will: pronounce the time of death, call the physician, complete paperwork, dispose of remaining medications, and contact the funeral home you've chosen.
- If you haven't chosen a funeral home, the nurse or social worker can help you find one. You do not need to have this decided in advance.
- The funeral home will come to transport the body. You can take as long as you need before this happens. Tell them when you are ready.

- Hospice equipment (hospital bed, oxygen, etc.) will be picked up. The hospice team arranges this — you don't need to call anyone.

Phase 3: First 24 Hours — Things that can wait until tomorrow

- Notify other family and friends. Ask one person to be the point of contact so you don't have to make 50 calls.
- Gather important documents: birth certificate, Social Security card, marriage certificate, military discharge papers (DD-214), life insurance policies, will/trust.
- Contact the funeral home to discuss arrangements (burial vs. cremation, visitation, service). They will guide you through every step.
- Secure the home. Lock doors, turn off medical equipment, secure valuables and medications. Return unused comfort kit medications to hospice or pharmacy.

Phase 4: First Week — Take these one at a time

- Order death certificates — request at least 10 copies. You'll need them for insurance, banks, property, and government agencies.
- Notify Social Security — call 1-800-772-1213. The funeral home may do this for you.
- Contact life insurance companies with a death certificate copy.
- Notify employer, pension, and VA (if applicable).
- Hospice bereavement services will contact you. Medicare covers 13 months of grief support — phone calls, visits, support groups. Accept the help.
- Accept help from people. When they say "let me know if you need anything," say yes. Meals, errands, childcare — let people help.

Remember: There is no wrong way to grieve. There is no timeline. You do not have to do everything on this list today, tomorrow, or even this week. These are suggestions, not rules. The most important thing right now is you.

Sources

1. NHPKO — <https://www.nhpco.org/>
2. National Institute on Aging — <https://www.nia.nih.gov/>
3. Medicare Hospice Benefits — <https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/hospice-care>

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Evidence-based resources for families navigating end of life