

The Comfort Kit

Medications Explained

Your hospice team may leave a small kit of medications at home for fast symptom relief. Here's what each one does, in plain language.

Morphine

Roxanol • Liquid concentrate

What it's for

Pain and shortness of breath

How it's given

By mouth or under the tongue — works in 15–30 minutes

"Will it hasten death?"

No. When properly dosed, morphine relieves suffering without hastening death. The dose is carefully adjusted by your hospice team. The goal is comfort — not sedation.

Lorazepam

Ativan • Liquid or dissolving tablet

What it's for

Anxiety, restlessness, trouble sleeping, seizure prevention

How it's given

By mouth, under the tongue, or as a dissolving tablet

"Will they be too sedated?"

The dose is adjusted to relieve anxiety while keeping your loved one as alert and comfortable as possible. If they seem too drowsy, tell your nurse — the dose can be reduced.

Haloperidol

Haldol • Liquid

What it's for

Confusion, agitation, terminal restlessness, nausea and vomiting

How it's given

Swallowed as a liquid — can also be given under the tongue

"They're seeing things — is that bad?"

Hallucinations at end of life are very common and usually not distressing to the patient. Haloperidol is used when the person is visibly agitated or uncomfortable — not just because they're seeing things.

Hyoscyamine

Levsin • Dissolving tablet

What it's for

Excess secretions ("death rattle"), stomach cramps, drooling

How it's given

Placed under the tongue — dissolves quickly

"The gurgling sounds terrible — are they choking?"

No. The gurgling sound ("death rattle") is caused by fluid in the throat that the person can no longer clear. It sounds much worse than it feels — your loved one is not choking or in pain from it.

Ondansetron

Zofran • Dissolving tablet or liquid

What it's for

Nausea and vomiting

How it's given

Placed on the tongue — dissolves without water

"They can't keep anything down."

Ondansetron works fast and doesn't need to be swallowed with water. If nausea persists, your nurse can adjust the plan — sometimes a combination approach works better.

Acetaminophen

Tylenol • Liquid or suppository

What it's for

Mild pain, fever, general discomfort

How it's given

By mouth (liquid) or rectally (suppository) when swallowing is difficult

"Is Tylenol enough for this level of pain?"

Acetaminophen works alongside stronger medications and helps with fever and mild pain. It's part of a comfort plan, not the whole plan. Your nurse will layer medications as needed.

Important

Never change a dose or give medication without direction from your hospice nurse. The comfort kit is there so relief is immediate — but always call first. Your nurse is available 24/7.

Sources

1. National Institute on Aging (NIH) — <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/providing-comfort-end-life>
2. American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) — <https://www.aafp.org/>
3. American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Care — <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ajh>

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