

# What is *palliative care?*



Misunderstandings about palliative care can prevent people from getting the care they need.

**Myth:** Palliative care means my doctor has given up on me.

**Fact:** Palliative care helps improve quality of life for people who have been diagnosed with an advanced illness. Palliative care is about controlling symptoms, providing information, planning care and making decisions with you. It is about respecting your wishes, and making sure you receive the emotional and spiritual support you need.

**Myth:** Palliative care is only available in hospital on a specialty palliative care unit.

**Fact:** Palliative care can be provided wherever you are – for instance, at home or in an outpatient clinic, hospital, or long-term care facility.

**Myth:** Palliative care is only offered in the last few days or hours of life.

**Fact:** Palliative care helps to improve the quality of your life throughout your illness.

**Myth:** Palliative care makes death come faster.

**Fact:** Palliative care does not hasten death. It provides comfort and the best quality of life from diagnosis of an advanced illness until end of life.

**Myth:** Pain is a part of dying.

**Fact:** Not always. It depends on the type of illness. If pain is experienced near the end of life, there are many ways it can be relieved.



**Myth:** Taking pain medications in palliative care leads to addiction.

**Fact:** Keeping people comfortable often requires increased doses of pain medication. This is a result of tolerance to medication as the body adjusts, not addiction.

**Myth:** Morphine is given to speed up dying.

**Fact:** The right doses of morphine keep a patient comfortable but do not hasten death.

**Myth:** Palliative care is only for people dying of cancer.

**Fact:** Palliative care can benefit patients and their families from the time of diagnosis of any illness that may shorten life.

**Myth:** If my cancer is treatable, that means it is curable and I will not require palliative care.

**Fact:** Ask for more information about the goals of the cancer treatments you are being offered. Sometimes therapies such as chemotherapy or radiation are offered to try to control the cancer for a period of time or to lessen the symptoms you are experiencing, but not to cure the disease.

**Myth:** People in palliative care who stop eating die of starvation.

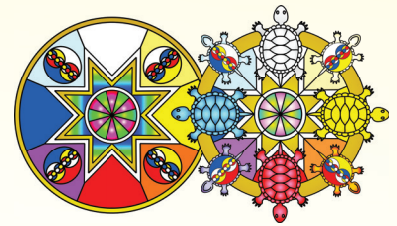
**Fact:** People with advanced illnesses don't experience hunger or thirst as healthy people do. People who stop eating die of their illness, not starvation.

**Myth:** We need to protect children from being exposed to death and dying.

**Fact:** Allowing children to talk about death and dying can help them develop healthy attitudes that will benefit them throughout their lives. Like adults, children also need time to say goodbye to people who are important to them.

**Myth:** I've let my family member down because she didn't die at home.

**Fact:** Despite our best efforts, some people need more care than we can provide at home. Ensuring that someone gets the best care, regardless of setting, is not a failure.



TURTLE MEDICINE WHEEL BY KAREN BISSON

*To see the Indigenous Voices video series and to learn more about living with serious illness and grief, go to [LivingMyCulture.ca](http://LivingMyCulture.ca)*

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