

Palliative Care Medicines

An information sheet for people receiving palliative care and their families

What is palliative care?

Palliative care aims to enhance quality of life for a person who is living with a life-limiting illness. Palliative care identifies and treats symptoms which may be physical, emotional, spiritual or social.

Why are medicines needed for people receiving palliative care?

People receiving palliative care may experience uncomfortable and troublesome symptoms, (such as pain, breathlessness or anxiety) as their illness progresses. Medicines can play an important role in preventing, controlling and relieving these symptoms. Most of the time, medicines will be ordered for a person to control the symptoms they are currently experiencing. Medicines can also be ordered ahead of time, if the doctor or nurse practitioner thinks that a person may need them in the future.

What type of medicines are used for palliative care?

- A range of medicines can be used for palliative care
- Medicines are chosen to suit the person and the symptoms that they may be experiencing
- Medicines used for palliative care are effective and safe to use in those receiving palliative care, especially when given at doses tailored to the person



Talk to your pharmacist, nurse or doctor if you would like more information about your palliative care medicines or the symptoms you may be experiencing.



How are palliative care medicines given?

Medicines used for palliative care can be given in many different ways, depending on which is best for the person. Medicines can be given subcutaneously (under the skin) through a cannula.

Some reasons for giving medicines subcutaneously include:

- If the person is having trouble swallowing medicines
- If the person is vomiting frequently
- If the doctor or nurse practitioner thinks that medicines taken by mouth are not working properly and will work better if given subcutaneously.

How much do palliative care medicines cost?

Most of the medicines used for palliative care are subsidised by the Australian Government Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Standard out-of-pocket costs apply and are determined by a person's Medicare and concession card status. However, some medicines are not listed on the PBS or may have restrictions around medical conditions they can be subsidised for. In these circumstances, medicines may need to be paid for privately.



Talk to your pharmacist if you would like more information on the cost of your palliative care medicines.

Other important information about palliative care medicines

- **Make sure there is at least three days' supply of medicines available in the home so that supplies do not run out**
 - Palliative care medicines are prescription medicines, and it may take a few days (especially in rural or remote locations) for the medicines to arrive at the pharmacy once ordered.
 - Check the amount of medicines in the home regularly and let the doctor, nurse and pharmacist know if stocks are running low.
- **Some pharmacies offer home-delivery**
 - If it is hard for you to pick up medicines from the pharmacy, ask your pharmacist if medicines can be home delivered.
- **Some pharmacies offer an after-hours service**
 - Urgent supply of palliative care medicines can happen out of business hours. Ask your pharmacist if the pharmacy has an after-hours service and how this can be accessed if needed.
- **Generic medicines are available**
 - Pharmacies may stock different brands of the same medicine. Using an alternative or generic brand of a medicine does not change the way the medicine works when given at the same dose and in the same way.
 - Purchasing the generic brand may reduce the cost of some medicines.



If you have any other questions about the medicines used for palliative care, talk to your pharmacist, nurse or doctor.

