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| How to talk to your doctor about voluntary assisted dying |
| Information for people considering voluntary assisted dying |

# Introduction

This factsheet provides information about talking to your doctor about voluntary assisted dying. The information in this factsheet is also available as part of the comprehensive guide [*Voluntary assisted dying – Information for people considering voluntary assisted dying*](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/voluntary-assisted-dying/community-consumer-information)<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/voluntary-assisted-dying/community-consumer-information>.

This information will help you get ready to talk to your doctor about voluntary assisted dying. You may find this useful if you are thinking about voluntary assisted dying, and need some further information.

When you want to talk to your doctor about voluntary assisted dying, you must bring it up first. Even if you only have a few questions, your doctor cannot talk about it unless you raise it first. Because talking about voluntary assisted dying with your doctor may feel difficult, this information will give you some ideas about how to prepare, what to say and what to expect from your doctor.

# Making the appointment

You should make a long appointment with your general practitioner (GP) or your specialist doctor (for example, neurologist or oncologist).

If you are in hospital, you should let the staff know you want to talk to your doctor about voluntary assisted dying, so they can arrange a time for the doctor to discuss it with you.

You can also ask a health practitioner (such as a nurse) for information if you want to.

Asking for information about voluntary assisted dying does not mean you have started the process for voluntary assisted dying. It is a way to help you get the facts you need to make a decision, if and when you are ready. Talking with your doctor may also help you figure out if you are likely to be eligible for voluntary assisted dying.

# What you can do before the appointment

* **Think about the reasons** why you are considering voluntary assisted dying.
* **Think about any symptoms you are experiencing** (for example, pain, fatigue, delirium or difficulty breathing).
* **Think about your fears about your disease** and how your life will end, so that you can ask what supports are available.
* **Consider taking a trusted person** with you to the appointment.
* **Let the doctor or receptionist know if you need an interpreter or speech pathologist** at the appointment.
  + **Think about any questions** you want to ask your doctor or anything else you think they should know.

If you can, you may also want to **write notes** about the points above to take to the appointment with you. You could also take this information pack with you.

Some questions you may want to ask your doctor about your disease include:

* What happens to people like me with this disease?
* What are the ways my disease can be treated?
* How will things change as my disease gets worse?
* Where will I be treated?
* What symptoms am I likely to experience as my disease gets worse?
* After treatment stops being effective, what could be done to help me manage my symptoms?
* What support will I be able to get while I am dying?
* What are the types of support available in my area?
  + What usually happens to people with my disease in the last weeks or days of life?

Some questions you may want to ask your doctor about voluntary assisted dying include:

* What is the process I have to go through?
* Can I decide when to take the medication?
* How do I get the medication?
* How does the medication work?
* How do I take the medication? Will it hurt?
* Can anything go wrong?
* What if I get worse and I can’t take the medication myself?
* Can I choose where I take the medication?
* Can I have people with me when I take the medication?
* What if I change my mind?
* What will my death certificate say?
* What costs should I expect?
* I would like help to talk to my family. Can you suggest some information I could use?
* What other information is available about voluntary assisted dying?
* Who else can I talk to about voluntary assisted dying? Are there organisations I can speak to?

# At the appointment

Your doctor can only talk to you about voluntary assisted dying after you have asked them about it first. If you have a trusted person with you at the appointment, they cannot ask for you. Only you can start the conversation.

When asking about it, you do not need to use the term ‘voluntary assisted dying’ but it will help to be really clear with your doctor about what you are asking. If you feel more comfortable with terms like ‘euthanasia’ or ‘dying with dignity’ you can use those instead.

Examples of ways to start the discussion include:

* I feel like I can’t go on like this; would voluntary assisted dying be an option for me?
* I don’t see the point of another couple of months slowly dying. Can you give me a drug to speed things up?
* Can you tell me about the voluntary assisted dying laws?
* Can you tell me how I can get the medicine to end my life?
* I want to know how you can help me to die.
* How do I get that medicine to end it all when it gets too much?

# What to expect from your doctor

Once you ask about voluntary assisted dying – or if your doctor is unsure whether you are talking about voluntary assisted dying – they may ask you some questions to help find out what you want. For example, if you ask a more general question like ‘I wish my life was over, can you help me?’ the doctor may ask you for more information to check what you are asking about.

Some questions your doctor may ask include:

* How long have you been feeling like this?
* What are your main concerns?
* What do you know about your disease and how it is progressing?
* What do you know about your treatment options? How do you feel about these options?
* What help with your symptoms would make your life more comfortable?
* What practical help would make your life more comfortable?
  + Have you heard of palliative care? How do you feel about getting palliative care support?

Your doctor may also:

* Encourage you to talk with someone you trust about your situation and how it is affecting you.
* Arrange a meeting with your carer, family, friend or support person, if you agree.

# What if your doctor cannot or will not help you?

Doctors, and other health practitioners, have the right not to give you information about voluntary assisted dying.

Your doctor may not want to give you information because:

* they do not agree with voluntary assisted dying
* they work in a health service that does not offer voluntary assisted dying
  + they are not qualified to give you the information you need.

In these cases, your doctor or health practitioner may refer you to someone who can help. If they do not, you can contact a voluntary assisted dying care navigator who can link you with the right person.

# If you make the decision to go through the voluntary assisted dying process

If you feel you have enough information, and decide you want to go through the process to seek voluntary assisted dying, and access the medication, you will need to make your first request. You can make your first request at this appointment or you can wait and make another appointment and then make your first request if you choose. Your first request should be clear, so the doctor understands exactly what you are asking.

Even after you have started the process for voluntary assisted dying, you can change your mind at any time, up until the time when you take the medication.

# Where to get more information

You can get more information about voluntary assisted dying from:

* your doctor or health practitioner
* a voluntary assisted dying care navigator.

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