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| Preparing to take the medications |
| Information for people considering voluntary assisted dying |

This factsheet provides information about preparing to take the voluntary assisted dying medication. 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>.

# Summary

Once you have the voluntary assisted dying medication, there are some things to think about and prepare for if you decide you want to take it:

* You do not have to take the medication at all, if you do not want to.
* Most people will take the voluntary assisted dying medication themselves.
* Knowing the right time to take the medication is different for everyone.
* You should think about where and when you want to take the medication, and who you would like with you (if anyone).
* If you are self-administering, you can take the medication at any time.
* People who cannot physically take the medication themselves or digest the medication can ask the doctor to administer it in a different way.
* If the doctor is giving you the medication, you will need to make an administration request before they can administer the medication.
* There is only a very small risk that something could go wrong once you have taken the medication.

# Getting access to the medication

You can only get access to the medication once you have been through the process for voluntary assisted dying.

# Deciding whether to take the medication

Once you have access to the medication, you can keep it for as long as you want. You do not have to use the medication within a particular time. Deciding whether you want to take the medication, and if so, the right time, is entirely up to you.

Some people will never take the medication - knowing they have the option to control the timing and manner of their death gives them enough comfort. It is okay if you decide the time is never right.

If you decide you do want to go ahead, you can talk with your doctor about the timing you would prefer. Knowing the right time to take the medication is different for everyone. You are the only one who can decide if and when you take the medication. Talking with those you trust and your doctor may help as they will also be noticing changes as your disease progresses.

# Arrangements to put in place before taking the medication

## Decide where you will take the medication

Most people will take the medication in their home. If you want to take the medication outside of your home, such as in a hospital, hospice or residential facility, you will need to check with the facility if they are able to support you. Some hospitals, hospices and residential facilities may not agree with voluntary assisted dying, or may not have the staff or privacy needed when you are taking the medication. You should start talking to your coordinating doctor as early as possible about where you would prefer to take the medication.

## Decide who you want with you

You should think about who you want with you when you take the medication. You are encouraged to have at least one other person there so you are not alone, but you do not have to.

Some people will want to have their carer, family members, friends or support person with them. If they cannot be with you or you have no one available, talk with your coordinating doctor about how someone could be there to support you.

If you choose not to have someone present it is important to let someone you trust know when and where you plan to take the medication. This is so that your death can be certified.

If the doctor is giving you the medication, they will need to be with you during the process.

If you are self-administering, you may want to have a doctor or other health practitioner (such as a nurse) with you, so they can make sure you are comfortable during the dying process. You will need to arrange this with your doctor or other health practitioner.

## Other arrangements to think about

Planning at the end of life is important to make sure your end-of-life wishes are known. You may find it helpful to talk to your carer, family, friend or support person about the following:

* religious and cultural considerations at the end of life
* care after death
* your will and financial matters
* funeral and burial arrangements
  + other personal matters that are important to you.

Your palliative care team or coordinating doctor can help you have these discussions.

If you have life insurance, you may want to check with the insurance company whether your cover will be affected if you take the voluntary assisted dying medication.

# Taking the medication

## Can anyone stop you?

The only person who can decide whether to take the medication is you.

If your decision to take the medication is difficult for those close to you, your coordinating doctor may be able to help you find ways to talk about voluntary assisted dying with them. See 'Talking about your end-of-life preferences'.

## I am self-administering. How do I take the medication?

The coordinating doctor will talk to you about how to take the medication when they arrange the prescription. The pharmacist will also give you verbal and written instructions when you access the medication.

You are encouraged to have your coordinating doctor or another health practitioner with you, if they agree, so they can make sure you are comfortable during the dying process. They cannot help you take the medication.

## What if I can no longer self-administer?

Some people who were going to self-administer may later become unable to digest, swallow or physically take the medication themselves. If this happens to you, you can ask your coordinating doctor to apply for a practitioner-administration permit. This will allow them to give you the medication instead.

## The doctor is administering me the medication. What do I need to do?

If your coordinating doctor is going to administer the medication, you will need to make a plan with them about when and where this will happen, and ensure their availability at a mutually acceptable time.

Once the coordinating doctor arrives, and you're ready, you will need to make an administration request to them. The request needs to be made:

* by you verbally, or using other means of communication (such as gestures or a communication device)
  + in the presence of a witness.

If you have difficulty speaking, you can use any other means of communication available to you to make the request (such as gesture, sign language or a communication aid).  
If you need the help of a qualified interpreter or speech pathologist to make the request, ask your coordinating doctor to organise for them to be there.

Once you have made the administration request, the coordinating doctor will give you the medication in a way you can best digest it.

## Could something go wrong?

Your coordinating medical practitioner will talk to you about the likely outcome and any risks of the voluntary assisted dying medication. If something does go wrong, and a health practitioner is present, the health practitioner can make sure you are comfortable during the dying process.

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