

# Common Questions Hospice Team Members Will Ask

A TEAM APPROACH TO CARE



## Why is my hospice nurse asking about pain?

The simple answer is that the hospice team wants to prevent or reduce your pain as much as possible. The complicated answer is that the hospice team and particularly the nurse, want to know about everything that may cause you discomfort. It's not just about documenting your pain level on a 0 to 10 scale, but it is about learning how you in particular feel. Everyone's pain is different, and it has to be managed in different ways. The nurse and your physician cannot help treat your pain without asking you about it.

The hospice team also does not want you to hide your pain or "just deal with it" because then they're not able to do what they do best, which is to provide comfort. You will be taught exactly how to take your pain medications, including how much and how often. If you develop increasing or unrelieved pain, the hospice team wants to know about that too, so you can get help to reduce or even stop the pain quickly.

There are also side effects to pain medication, just like there are side effects to taking calcium or iron; there will always be some kind of response to anything you put in your body. The hospice nurse wants you and your family to understand what these side effects are, so that if they become negative, like causing you to be too sleepy or nauseated, it can be fixed.

If you are not having any pain, the hospice team wants to know about that as well, to keep you comfortable and able to continue to function and enjoy your days with your family and friends.



## Why is my hospice nurse asking about constipation?

Constipation is a common side effect of taking opioid pain medications, which hospice patients may be prescribed. It can also be a common side effect with certain disease processes. Even drinking less fluids and being less mobile can cause constipation.

Constipation is not comfortable. Bloating, painful abdomens or hard, uncomfortable bowel movements are not ideal. Even though it can seem embarrassing, your nurse will ask about your bowel habits a lot. Your nurse will make sure you are passing stools as regularly as possible, or at least that you are not having additional discomfort related to bowel movements.

## Why is my hospice nurse asking about shortness of breath?

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Shortness of breath or trouble breathing can happen due to increased pain, anxiety, and other disease processes. It can be scary to not be able to catch your breath, and there are many respiratory medications and treatments that can fix that feeling. Just like having too much pain, feeling like you cannot catch your breath causes discomfort, tension, and a poor quality of life.

Your hospice team wants to know about your shortness of breath, even if it is not occurring while they are visiting, so your nurse and physician can monitor this symptom and step in if they need to and help treat it.

## Why is my hospice nurse asking about anxiety?

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Anxiety is a normal emotion. Feelings of stress and nervousness can lead to actual agitation and anxiety, even aggression in some instances. Your hospice team is trained to recognize signs of anxiety and help intervene in calming, proactive ways.

For the hospice nurse, helping to manage anxiety may also mean educating on medications that are available to also relieve the feelings of anxiety. Anxiety is very different for every patient and can be treated in a variety of ways, from music therapy to sitting with a favorite pet to having to take a certain pill when it occurs.

Developing the right treatment for an individual's anxiety means asking questions and allowing the entire team to help support that anxious feeling and hopefully make it disappear.

Your hospice team asks questions because they are constantly updating your plan of care to make it unique to your own needs. You and your family are a part of that care team and should also be asking questions. Nothing is too simple to ask and communication is key for everyone!