

Palliative care is appropriate for all those living with and dying from serious illness. Healthcare teams provide palliative care for people wherever they live. If physical or emotional suffering is not relieved, palliative care experts are available to help. Through careful team assessment and care, achieving comfort is possible.

***People preparing for end of life may worry: “What if I am not able to be comfortable as I die? “  
If suffering cannot be relieved in last days of life, palliative sedation therapy (PST) is an option.***

### What is Palliative Sedation Therapy?

Palliative sedation therapy (PST) involves giving medications to a dying person who is suffering to keep them as sedated as required to be comfortable. PST is needed for only a small number of dying people.

### How does PST differ from Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD)?

While PST and MAiD both aim to relieve suffering, they are not the same. MAiD is a process whereby a provider helps a patient voluntarily and intentionally end their life. With PST, death occurs naturally from the underlying illness, not medications. PST medications are given to relieve suffering by making a patient less aware.

Criteria for palliative sedation therapy are different from MAiD in that PST is only an option when other comfort measures have not been effective and a person is in their last days of life.

### How does the process work?

A decision for palliative sedation therapy follows conversations with your doctor or nurse practitioner. Your provider will ask for your verbal consent to start PST. If you are not capable to provide consent, it can be given by the person who can make healthcare decisions on your behalf (a substitute decision maker, such as family, a close friend, or a healthcare representative).

Once started, PST medications are gradually increased until you are comfortable. You need ongoing care and medication to ensure you stay comfortable.



### What happens after you are sedated?

Once sedated, you are less aware. You may be able to hear but are less able to respond. You may want to say goodbye to your loved ones before starting PST, as your ability to respond is more limited once started. You can express your wishes for the level of sedation you wish, before PST is started.

Changes happen naturally as death approaches. The timing of death is not predictable. Death may occur soon after sedation starts, or after several days.

### Who do I speak with about options at end of life?

As in other stages of life, wishes at the end of life vary from person to person. Talk with your primary care providers and/or the palliative care consultant so you are aware of your options, and ensure others who may be called on to speak on your behalf know your wishes.

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*Contacts for further information:*

*Information about palliative care and palliative sedation therapy: Email [palliative@viha.ca](mailto:palliative@viha.ca)*

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