

Introduction

Serious illnesses can cause both physical and psychological symptoms. Treatments for these illnesses may also cause symptoms or side effects. Palliative care relieves symptoms and improves your quality of life. It does not attempt to treat or cure your disease.

Hospice care, which is care at the end of life, always includes palliative care. But you may receive palliative care at any stage of a disease. The goal is to make you comfortable and improve your quality of life.



This reference summary will help you understand palliative care. It includes information about who needs it and how it benefits the patient.

Palliative Care

Palliative care is care given to relieve symptoms without treating or curing a disease. It is a central part of treatment for serious or life threatening illnesses.

Some examples of serious illnesses include:

- Brain and spinal cord diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease.
- Cancer.
- Cardiac diseases.
- HIV/AIDS.
- Kidney failure.
- Respiratory diseases.



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Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder that usually starts in late middle age or old age and gets worse over time. Symptoms include loss of memory, confusion, difficulty thinking and changes in language, behavior and personality.

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It kills or damages the body's immune system cells. AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. It is the most advanced stage of infection with HIV.

Serious illnesses can cause physical symptoms, such as nausea or fatigue. You may also have psychological symptoms like depression or anxiety. The treatments for your disease may cause symptoms or side effects. Palliative care can help lessen your discomfort from these symptoms.

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Palliative care is offered in many settings. It may be offered in health care settings, including:

- Hospitals.
- Long term care facilities.
- Outpatient clinics.

Palliative care may also be offered through hospice or at your home. Palliative care is provided by a team including palliative care doctors, nurses and social workers. Other team members may include:

- Massage therapists.
- Pharmacists.
- Nutritionists.
- Chaplains.



Many insurance plans cover some or all of the costs of palliative care. If you are concerned about the cost, a social worker or financial consultant can help you. You can get palliative care by asking for it. Talk to your family, caregivers or a member of your health care team about palliative care.

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Who Needs It?

Many adults and children living with illnesses experience physical symptoms and emotional distress related to their disease. This includes people affected by cancer, heart or lung disease, kidney failure and other diseases or illnesses.

Sometimes people experience symptoms related to the medical treatments they are receiving. Palliative care can also help ease these symptoms.

You may want to consider palliative care if you or your loved one:

- Suffers from pain or other symptoms due to ANY serious illness.
- Experiences physical or emotional pain that is NOT under control.
- Needs help understanding the situation and coordinating care.



What Are The Benefits?

Starting palliative care early in the treatment of patients with serious illnesses can improve their quality of life, lift their mood and lengthen their lives. Unlike hospice care, which is only given to patients near the end of life, patients receiving palliative care do not have to give up curative treatments. They can continue receiving treatment for their illness while individual symptoms are addressed through palliative care.

The palliative care team works with your own health care provider to provide an extra level of support for you and your family. The team provides symptom management, extra time for communication and help navigating the health system.

Palliative care also helps you gain the strength to carry on with daily life. It improves your ability to tolerate medical treatments. It also helps you better understand your choices for treatment.

Summary

Palliative care is specialized medical care for people with serious illnesses. It is focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of a serious illness, no matter their diagnosis. It can be provided in the hospital, outpatient clinic, at home, through hospice and in other settings.

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The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and the patient's family. Palliative care is provided by a team of doctors, nurses and other specialists who work together with a patient's other health care providers to provide an extra level of support.

If you are being treated for a serious illness, starting palliative care early in treatment can boost your quality of life, lift your mood and lengthen your life. Talk to your health care provider for more information on palliative care.



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