

What is Comfort Care? - A Guide for Carers

Mouth comfort

A dry mouth is common during VSED and can be uncomfortable. Comfort comes from moistening the mouth, not from drinking. Use mouth sponges, a fine water spray, or a small oral dropper if appropriate. Apply lip balm regularly. Artificial saliva can help. During VSED, small slivers of ice, with or without flavour, can sometimes help relieve dry mouth and improve comfort without restarting eating or drinking.

Skin comfort

Keep the skin clean and comfortable by gently washing with warm water and a soft cloth. Apply moisturiser to dry or fragile skin. Change bedding or clothing promptly if it becomes damp or soiled. Bed pads can help protect both skin and bedding.

Position and physical comfort

Help the person change position gently from time to time to ease stiffness or discomfort. Use pillows to support the back, arms, legs, or head. Move slowly and explain what you are doing. Even small adjustments can make a difference.

Warmth, cooling, and breathing comfort

Adjust bedding to keep the person comfortably warm or cool. A light fan or a slightly open window can help if the air feels heavy. A warm blanket or hot water bottle can be comforting if they feel cold.

Calm, reassurance, and presence

Speak softly and calmly. Let the person know who is with them and what is happening. It is okay to sit quietly. Your presence alone is comforting. Continue to talk even if they are no longer responding. Being calmly present is important, which means staying alongside someone with kindness and attention, allowing them to express whatever they need: words, tears, or silence without pressure or judgement.

Sound, light, and surroundings

Create a calm environment. Keep household noise to a minimum. Use soft lighting rather than bright overhead lights. Play music, readings, or familiar voices if the person finds them comforting. Keep the room uncluttered and peaceful.

Touch and connection

Gentle touch, such as holding or stroking a hand or lightly applying moisturiser, can be reassuring if welcomed. Always follow the person's cues and respect their wishes if they prefer less touch.

Complementary Therapies

Some people may like to have complementary therapies such as massage, Reiki, reflexology, and aromatherapy.

Food smells

Strong food or cooking smells can sometimes be distressing during VSED. Keeping these smells out of the person's space will help maintain comfort.

Visitors and boundaries

Follow the person's wishes about who visits. As energy levels decrease, fewer and shorter visits are often more comfortable. A "Do not disturb" notice on the door can help protect rest and quiet time.

When to ask for help

If you feel unsure or need reassurance, having GP and community nursing support in place helps ensure comfort-focused medication and advice are available if needed, including out of hours.