

This guide explains three types of care focused on **relieving symptoms, improving comfort, and supporting quality of life** for people facing serious or life-limiting illnesses.

## What is Palliative Care?

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**Palliative care** is specialized medical care for people living with serious illnesses. It focuses on **relief from symptoms, pain, and emotional stress**, regardless of diagnosis or stage of illness.

- Can be provided alongside curative treatment
- Helps manage pain, nausea, shortness of breath, fatigue, and anxiety
- Supports emotional, spiritual, and family needs
- Available in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and at home

**Who can receive it?** Anyone with a serious illness (e.g., cancer, heart failure, COPD, kidney disease)

**When?** At any stage of illness—can begin at diagnosis

## What is Comfort Care?

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**Comfort care** refers to **medical care focused entirely on comfort**, rather than curing illness. It is only done in the hospital setting and it is usually provided **near the end of life** when treatments to prolong life are stopped.

- Includes pain and symptom control (e.g., morphine, oxygen, sedatives)
- May involve stopping life-sustaining treatments (e.g., ventilators, feeding tubes)
- Emphasizes **peace, dignity, and reduced suffering**
- Can be provided **with or without hospice enrollment**

**Who can receive it?** Anyone near the end of life who chooses not to pursue curative care

**When?** Typically, in the final **days to weeks of life**

## What is Hospice Care?

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**Hospice care** is a specialized type of **palliative and comfort care** for people who are nearing the **end of life**, with a prognosis of **six months or less** if the illness runs its normal course.

- Stops curative treatments to focus on comfort and quality of life
- Provides medical, emotional, spiritual, and practical support
- Offered **at home, in hospice facilities, nursing homes, or hospitals**
- Includes **bereavement support** for families after the patient's death

**Who can receive it?** Patients with terminal illness and a life expectancy of 6 months or less

**When?** When curative treatments are no longer effective or desired

## Understanding Palliative Care, Comfort Care and Hospice Care

Quick Comparison Table

| Feature                         | Palliative Care                 | Comfort Care                              | Hospice Care                                |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Timing</b>                   | Any stage of illness            | Last 6 months of life / Near end of life  | Last 6 months of life / Near end of life    |
| <b>Treatment Type</b>           | Can include curative treatment  | No curative treatment                     | No curative treatment                       |
| <b>Primary Goal</b>             | Quality of life, symptom relief | Comfort and dignity                       | Comfort, dignity, family support            |
| <b>Who Provides It</b>          | Specialized medical team        | Nurses, doctors (varies)                  | Interdisciplinary hospice team              |
| <b>Where Provided</b>           | Hospital, home, clinic          | Home, hospital, hospice                   | Home, hospice facility, hospital            |
| <b>Includes Family Support?</b> | Yes                             | Sometimes                                 | Yes (including grief support)               |
| <b>Covered by Insurance?</b>    | Often yes (varies)              | Sometimes through hospital insurance plan | Yes (Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance) |

### Key Takeaways

- **Palliative care:** Improves quality of life at any point in a serious illness.
- **Comfort care:** Focuses solely on comfort when life-prolonging care is no longer wanted and in the hospital setting. Patients receiving comfort care are often discharged with hospice care.
- **Hospice care:** A comprehensive approach to end-of-life care that includes comfort care, emotional support, and family services.