

Non-Drug Management for Common Symptoms at the End of Life

Use of non-drug symptom management strategies can help relieve symptoms and reduce reliance on medications. Generally non-drug approaches to symptom management are preferred, particularly for mild to moderate symptoms.

Symptom	Non-drug measures
Agitation* or Restlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repositioning • Calm surrounding environment, quiet room, dim lights • Reassurance
Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore fears and concerns • Provide reassurance • Address spiritual or religious needs • Distraction – e.g. playing music or radio, watching TV • Relaxation techniques e.g. visualisation, deep breathing, mindfulness
Breathlessness (at rest or minimal exertion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positions that can help with breathlessness <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">    </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathing techniques (e.g. breathing round a rectangle, focus on “out” breath) • Reduce room temperature / Open window • Cooling the face by using a flannel or cloth • Reassurance • Relaxation techniques • Avoid portable fans due to infection control risk in COVID-19
Confusion*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-orientate (explain where they are, who they are etc) and reassure • Ensure lighting levels mimic the time of day • Ensure the patient has access to glasses and hearing aid if applicable • If family members can be present involve them in reassuring the patient
Cough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suck on menthol sweets(e.g. fisherman’s friends) or other hard sweets • Honey and lemon in warm water • Humidify room air • Increase oral fluids • Elevate the head when sleeping
Dry Mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gently brush teeth with fluoride containing toothpaste • Sip fluids • Suck ice chips • Apply dry mouth gel (e.g. BioXtra / Oralieve / Biotente oral balance gel) to lips tongue and gums every 2 hours as needed.
Fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce room temperature • Wear loose clothing • Cooling the face by using a cool flannel or cloth • Oral fluids • Avoid portable fans as infection control risk in COVID-19
Nausea and Vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea Bands applied to wrists • Ginger tea • Good mouth care – see above • Ice chips • Distraction e.g playing music or radio, watching TV
Pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heat or cold applied to painful area (e.g. wheat bags, Deep Heat or Deep Freeze cream) • Gentle massage • Distraction e.g playing music or radio, watching TV • Relaxation methods and techniques e.g visualisation, deep breathing

*Also need to consider reversible causes of these symptoms