

End of Life Care for

JEWISH

PATIENTS



KEY POINTS

- Respect for life and the importance of saving human lives are essential Jewish values. All other directives may be thought of as secondary to these goals.
- The Sabbath (Shabbat or Shabbos in Hebrew and Yiddish, respectively) is a sacred day of rest and spiritual reflection that begins on Friday evening at sunset and ends on Saturday evening approximately an hour after sunset. It begins and ends later in the summer and earlier in the winter.
- Many Jews refrain from certain activities on the Sabbath to honor the commandment in the Torah to keep the day holy.
- For some Jewish individuals, maintaining kosher dietary laws holds deep significance, shaping their culinary choices and daily rituals.
- Asking patients about their kosher practices shows that you respect their choices and are willing to work with them to make their experience as comfortable and culturally appropriate as possible.



END OF LIFE MEDICAL CARE

- Jewish patients may recognize many life experiences with specific spoken prayers, blessings and rituals.
- Due to collective and intergenerational trauma from persecutive and proselytizing, Jewish patients may be reluctant to discuss their religious beliefs and observance with non-Jewish clinicians, including spiritual care providers in some cases.
- Some highly observant Jews may rely on teachings and directives from the rabbis in their communities regarding questions about the use of life-prolonging therapies.



PRACTICES WHEN APPROACHING END OF LIFE

- Jewish views about the afterlife are diverse.
- Some highly observant Jews may express reluctance around organ donation while other individuals will be open to the practice.
- There are a variety of traditional Jewish practices following death. It is important to ask patients and families about their particular needs.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Within any faith tradition, members may hold individual and differing beliefs.
- Inquire about patient preferences in medical decision making, preferred support, rituals, and timing of medications with respectful curiosity.
- For additional support, contact the palliative care or hospice chaplain or a member of the chaplaincy department who can also help connect the patient and/or family to local faith leaders.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/death-mourning-101/>

<https://www.advancingexpertcare.org/education-events/on-demand-education/22diversity-equity-inclusion-belonging/>



The Diversity in Health Care video series was made possible through a grant from the Jack Buncher Foundation to develop resources for providing culturally appropriate end-of-life care to Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist patients. View the full video series [here](#).

If you have any questions, please contact info@hpnf.org.