



# Saying Goodbye...

A Guide for You and Your Family



Changi  
General Hospital  

---

SingHealth

# Contents

Saying goodbye	1
Keeping my loved one comfortable	2
As death approaches	4
Physical signs of the final hours	5
Understanding the final hours	7
When death occurs	8
How to arrange for death certification	9
How to obtain the digital death certificate	10
Coroner's case	14
Post-death matters	16
Proper disposal of controlled drugs - ampoules, pre-filled syringes, Fentanyl patches	17
Caring for yourself after death of loved one	18
References and resources	23

## Saying goodbye

Dying is a natural part of life and it may stir up mixed emotions when you and your family reflect on it. It is normal to feel a sense of loss or helplessness in the final stages of your loved one's life.

### Why do I feel this way?

- ▶ Grieving for the loss of your loved one who is sick and feeling a sense of loss in your own life.
- ▶ Acceptance of what is happening at present, which may include a change of role with new demands and duties.
- ▶ Letting go of hopes for a long-term future with your loved one.
- ▶ Finding purpose and meaning in the experience while grieving and balancing the demands of caregiving and family support.

We hope that this guide will provide useful information to support you and your family in providing care to your loved one in the last days of his/ her life with warmth and comfort.



# Keeping my loved one comfortable

## Environment

- ▶ Maintain a pleasant room atmosphere by keeping the room cool, quiet and well-ventilated.
- ▶ Avoid bright light that may be too glaring on the eyes.
- ▶ Play soothing music, prayer hymns or even your loved one's favourite music at a low volume next to the bedside to provide a sense of calmness and serenity.

## Communication

- ▶ Sit and hold your loved one's hand and speak gently into his/ her ears. Your loved one may be experiencing many losses including the loss of control over his/ her life. It is important to continue to reassure him/ her that you and your family are by their side, caring for them.
- ▶ Try to take time each day to talk to your loved one about his/ her thoughts or feelings, and to share your own with him/ her.
- ▶ Orientate your loved one to the date and time of the day.
- ▶ Reminisce past joys and sorrows with your loved one.
- ▶ Use this time to listen to what is important to your loved one.
- ▶ Your loved one may want to tie up loose ends by talking about where important documents, mementos, pictures and chosen clothes are kept. Take the time to listen to them.
- ▶ Encourage your loved one to discuss any fears, concerns, or spiritual distress he/ she may have. You can offer to contact a friend, counsellor, medical social worker (MSW) or even chaplains or religious leaders, where appropriate, to connect with them. Do ensure privacy when required.





## Hygiene

To promote bonding and express love and care, you or your family can provide basic hygiene to your loved one. Approach your healthcare professionals for a demonstration or advice if you and your family are unsure of how to do so.

- ▶ Oral care — keep the mouth clean by using a moist cotton wool or gauze at least twice a day. Apply lip balm for them if their lips are dry. A clean and moist mouth provides comfort and maintains dignity to the end of life.
- ▶ Eye care — administer eye drops or gels at least twice a day to prevent eye dryness.
- ▶ Skin care — turn your loved one to face the left or the right every two hours, if possible. This allows pressure relief as lying in the same position for a long time may cause pressure sores or pain and discomfort.
- ▶ Sponge your loved one in bed to maintain hygiene and provide comfort.
- ▶ Change diapers when they are soiled. If possible, apply some barrier cream to prevent direct skin contact with excretions such as urine or stools, which can result in skin breakdown.

## As death approaches

Each person's death experience is unique, but there are some common signs that accompany the process of dying. These natural changes can take place over months, days, or even hours.

Near death awareness may come about in the form of episodes of confusion or waking dreams. Your loved one may report dreaming of, seeing or even speaking with loved one that have demised. They may also talk about going on trips or seeing lights, butterflies, and other symbols that you and your family are unable to see.

As your loved one approaches the final hours, he/ she will eat and talk less, spend more time sleeping, and lose interest in activities he/ she once enjoyed. Eventually, your loved one will stop eating, drinking, and talking.



# Physical signs of the final hours

## Airway

When your loved one loses his/ her swallowing reflexes, saliva collects at the back of the throat and causes noisy breathing, which they are unaware of.

- ▶ Turn your loved one to face one side to allow the saliva to drain out.
- ▶ Avoid oral suctioning as it will not ease the noisy breathing and may cause trauma, such as bleeding, to the airway.
- ▶ Approach our healthcare team about your concerns. Medications can be administered to minimise the secretions.

## Breathing

Your loved one may start to breathe with his/ her mouth open as muscles lose their tone — he/ she may appear to be gasping for air. This is the normal process of dying.

Breathing patterns may also change as some may take loud rapid breaths while others take fast shallow breaths. The rhythm of breathing may become irregular and breathing may stop for a few seconds. These pauses in breathing grow longer in duration as the end draws near. Your loved one would likely be unaware of this and be largely undisturbed by it.

- ▶ Supplemental oxygen is not essential at this point as it will not help with their breathing.

## Blood circulation

As the heart starts to pump slower, blood flow to the body decreases, causing body temperature to slowly lower. Your loved one's complexion will look pale and their limbs, especially their fingers and toes, will feel cool to the touch.

Mottling (purplish discolouration) will appear on their palms and soles of feet.

Pulses will become weak or may not even be felt.

- ▶ Simply cover your loved one with a light blanket and make him/ her comfortable.
- ▶ Our healthcare team will be able to advise you and your family of the impending demise.

## Confusion

Occasionally, a dying person may appear restless and uncomfortable as he/ she fidgets in bed, gestures with his/ her hands or speaks incoherently.

- ▶ Approach our healthcare team if you are concerned. Medications may be administered to calm your loved one down and give comfort.

## Drowsiness

Your loved one will feel more tired, become very sleepy, and may not respond to you and your family.

- ▶ Continue to talk to your loved one to let him or her know that you and your family are keeping vigil by his/ her bedside.

## Eating

Food is often strongly associated with expressions of love and filial piety. However, as the body of your loved one slows down, he/ she will not require as many calories to sustain his/ her weakening body functions.

- ▶ Offer food in small amounts if your loved one is still able to swallow but do not insist if he/ she refuses. Forcing food into the mouth may cause choking.
- ▶ Fluids can be given in sips or via syringes in small amounts if your loved one is still able to swallow. Small ice chips can also be given.
- ▶ Giving food or drink when your loved one can no longer eat or drink through the mouth may cause more harm than good, and is not advisable.





## Understanding the final hours

The “final hours” vary for individuals and refer to the period just before death occurs. This dying process may last for a few hours or take several days.

Sometimes, your loved one may linger on despite having signs of an impending death. This may happen when they feel that they have unfinished business or are uncertain over how you and your family would cope when they pass on.

What you can do is to provide reassurance to your loved one so that they may leave this world in peace.

We encourage you to express five phrases that would mean a lot to the dying and to those who remain. Words you may wish to say in the limited time you have left with your dying loved one include:





## When death occurs

- ▶ Breathing will cease totally.
- ▶ Pulsation will not be felt anymore.
- ▶ Eyelids may be slightly open, with the pupils (black circles of the eyes) enlarged and the vision fixed in one position.
- ▶ Jaw is relaxed with the mouth partially open.
- ▶ Your loved one may soil himself or herself as his/ her bowel and bladder muscles relax.
- ▶ Body is usually still warm to the touch when death has just occurred but will gradually become cool as time passes.

## If death occurs at home, stay calm.

- ▶ Watch for a few minutes to confirm that your loved one has stopped breathing and take note of the time.
- ▶ Allow you and your family to have some quiet moments.
- ▶ Position your loved one in a comfortable position. Put on his/ her dentures, if applicable, before the body starts to stiffen.
- ▶ Take your time to handle practical matters and register the death within 24 hours.

**If death occurs in the hospital, our healthcare team will advise you on what to do next.**

# How to arrange for death certification

## If death occurs at home

A doctor is required to certify the death:

- ▶ Contact your family doctor/ general practitioner (GP) who will be willing to make a house call.
- ▶ Contact the home hospice support team if your loved one is under their care.
- ▶ Call a casket company who will be able to arrange for a doctor to certify the death.

You will need to prepare any one of these documents belonging to your loved one:

- ▶ Original NRIC
- ▶ Passport
- ▶ Driver's licence
- ▶ Any document with your loved one's photo and identification number

For known and natural causes of death, the doctor will register the death and provide you with a death certificate number. You will use this death certificate number to obtain your loved one's digital death certificate (see next section for more information).

If death has occurred without any known cause (i.e., you have received a doctor's memo stating that it is a coroner's case), you will need to call the police at 999 for the body to be sent to the Mortuary@HSA (located at Block 9, Singapore General Hospital) in a police hearse.

## If death occurs in the hospital

You do not need to prepare any documents.

For known and natural causes of death, a doctor will issue a printout containing the following details to be used to obtain your loved one's digital death certificate:

- ▶ Date of death
- ▶ Your loved one's identification number
- ▶ Death certificate number

# How to obtain the digital death certificate

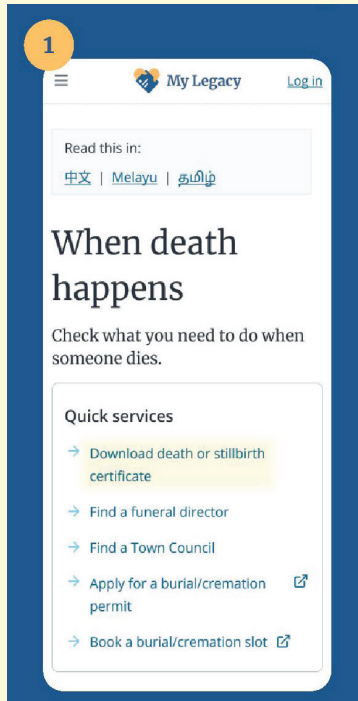
Death certificates can be downloaded via the My Legacy app or My Legacy website.

Steps to download your loved one's digital death certificate:

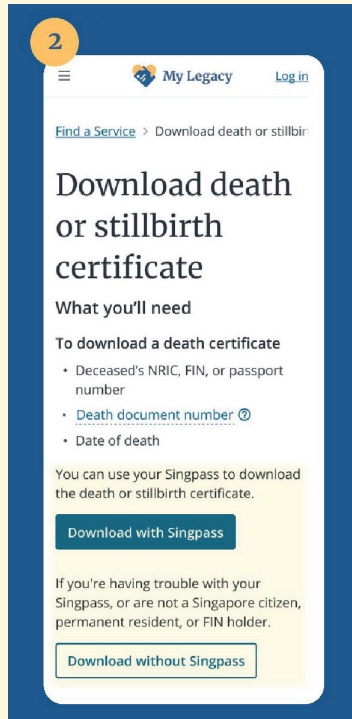
1. Download the My Legacy app via the App Store or Google Play Store, or go to the website at [go.gov.sg/mylegacy-edc](https://go.gov.sg/mylegacy-edc) by scanning the QR code below:



It will bring you to this webpage:

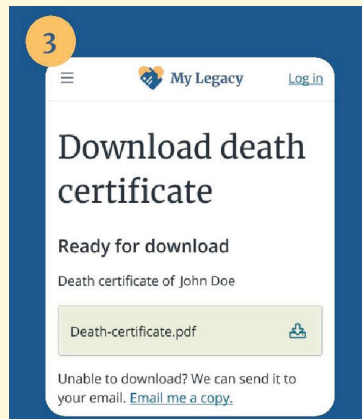


2. Log in using your SingPass\*.



3. Enter the details of your loved one:

- ▶ Date of death
- ▶ Identification number
- ▶ Death certificate number



4. You will be directed to a webpage to download the digital death certificate.

The death certificate will be available for download for up to a month from the date of death and there is no limit to the number of people who can download it. To prevent misuse by unauthorised parties, destroy your loved one's NRIC by cutting it in half.

\*Follow the steps below if you do not have SingPass.

- ▶ Select the option to login without SingPass
- ▶ Provide your personal details to login without Singpass
  - Identification type
  - Identification number
  - Email
  - Mobile number

For more information, please refer to the My Legacy brochure or email the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) or My Legacy.

For urgent queries, please contact the following agency:

---

▶ **Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA)**

Call Centre: (65) 6391 6100

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 8.00am to 5.00pm

Saturday: 8.00am to 1.00pm

Closed on Sunday and Public Holiday.

Email: ICA\_DPU\_RBD@ica.gov.sg

---

For non-urgent queries, you may visit any of these locations:

---

▶ **Kampong Chai Chee Community Club**

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Sunday: 10.00am to 6.00pm  
Closed on Public Holiday.

---

▶ **Neer Soon Central Community Centre**

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Sunday: 10.00am to 6.00pm  
Closed on Public Holiday.

---

▶ **Our Tampines Hub**

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Sunday: 9.00am to 6.00pm  
Closed on Public Holiday.

---

▶ **The Frontier Community Club**

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Sunday: 10.00am to 6.00pm  
Closed on Public Holiday.

---



## Coroner's case

In Singapore, all deaths that occur suddenly without a known cause or are suspected to be due to an unnatural cause are considered a coroner's case and are reportable to the coroner.

A police investigating officer (IO) will be assigned to each coroner's case. The IO will conduct the necessary interviews with you and your family, and guide you on the necessary procedures. The coroner will review the case and determine if an autopsy is required.

You or your family will be informed of the coroner's decision and when you can claim the body of your loved one.

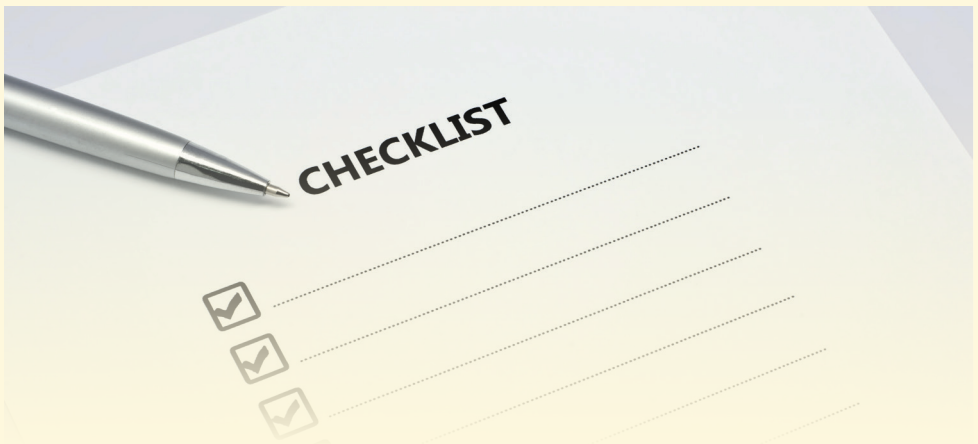
### **Mortuary @ HSA operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 8.00am to 4.30pm

Saturday, Sunday & Public Holiday: 8.00am to 12.30pm

### **Documents to prepare**

- ▶ Your loved one's original NRIC or passport.
- ▶ The claimant's original NRIC or passport.
- ▶ All available medical documents relating to your loved one.
- ▶ All medications belonging to your loved one.





## How to arrange for a funeral/ wake

Funerals can be simple or elaborate, and differ by religion. You will need to decide on the location and duration of the wake and funeral. They can be held at a funeral parlour, void deck, or at your house.

A funeral director can help you with the funeral arrangements. Scan the QR code or go to the Association of Funeral Directors Singapore's website at <https://afd.org.sg/finding-a-funeral-director/> for information on funeral directors.



## How to apply for a permit for burial/ cremation/ ash scattering/ columbarium niche

The application for the permit for burial/ cremation/ ash scattering/ columbarium niche can be done via the NEA e-portal at <https://www.eportal.nea.gov.sg/category/After-Death>. Scan the QR code below or go to the My Legacy website to access this portal.



If you have engaged a funeral director or caretaker, he/ she will apply for the permit on your behalf.

## Post-death matters

### For burial matters

- ▶ **Choa Chu Kang Cemetery**  
910 Choa Chu Kang Road  
Singapore 699819  
Tel: (65) 6793 7428

### For cremation matters

- ▶ **Mandai Crematorium**  
300 Mandai Road  
Singapore 779393  
Tel: (65) 6554 5655

#### **Operating hours:**

Monday to Sunday: 8.30am to 5.30pm

### For niche matters

- ▶ **Mandai Crematorium**  
300 Mandai Road  
Singapore 779393  
Tel: (65) 6554 5655
- ▶ **Choa Chu Kang Columbarium**  
51 Chinese Cemetery Path 4  
Singapore 698932  
Tel: (65) 6795 9731
- ▶ **Yishun Columbarium**  
(Bookings to be done at Mandai Columbarium)  
Yishun Ring Road  
Singapore 768691  
Tel: (65) 6459 5121

#### **Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 4.30pm

Saturday: 8.30am to 4.30pm

Should you or your family wish to bury your loved one's body outside of Singapore, a coffin (export) permit for your loved one will be required. Your engaged funeral directors will be able to assist you. Fees are applicable. More information can be obtained by contacting these offices:

▶ **Port Health Office**

4545 Jalan Bukit Merah  
Singapore 159466  
Tel: (65) 6222 2585

▶ **Airport Health Office Singapore**

Singapore Changi Airport  
#04-08 Terminal 1  
Singapore 819462  
Tel: (65) 6543 2515

**Operating hours:** 24 Hours

## Documents to prepare

- ▶ Your loved one's death certificate (CCOD)
- ▶ Embalming certificate (available from funeral directors)
- ▶ Sealing certificate of the coffin (available from funeral directors)

## Proper disposal of controlled drugs – ampoules, pre-filled syringes, Fentanyl patches

Medication ampoules or patches containing controlled drugs such as Fentanyl or Morphine have to be disposed properly to prevent misuse.



*Fentanyl ampoule*



*Morphine ampoule*



*Fentanyl patch*

You can return the ampoules, medication syringes and Fentanyl patches to the Pharmacy in Changi General Hospital (CGH) for proper disposal when they are no longer required.

## Caring for yourself after your loved one's death

Grief is a natural response to loss. You may only become more aware of the grief after all the necessary rites and rituals are completed.

Everyone grieves differently and there are no guidelines to dictate how your grieving process should be like. Your grief experience may also be influenced by factors such as:

- ▶ The acuity of events that led to the death of your loved one, which may have been unexpected, premature or shocking.
- ▶ Your emotional connection and relationship with your loved one.
- ▶ Your family, social and religious support network.
- ▶ Your personality, especially if there is any history of mental illnesses like depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or substance abuse disorder.
- ▶ Your previous experience(s) with loss and grief.
- ▶ The presence of other stressful events or situations you are dealing with during this period of grief such as experiencing more than one death within a short timeframe.



### Signs of grief that would require professional help and advice include:

- ▶ Difficulty functioning in life (e.g., work, school, financial, parenting, etc.)
- ▶ Constantly thinking about your loved one's death and being unable to focus on other things.
- ▶ Excessive feelings of sorrow, anger, irritability, resentment or guilt.
- ▶ Neglecting personal care, hygiene or grooming.
- ▶ Substance abuse (e.g., turning to alcohol, drugs etc.)
- ▶ Hearing voices or seeing things that are not actually there.
- ▶ Persistent thoughts and feelings of being worthless and hopeless.
- ▶ Sleeping problems (e.g., insomnia, or sleeping at odd hours etc.)
- ▶ Reckless, impulsive or potentially self-destructive behaviour.
- ▶ Talking about suicide or actual suicide attempts.
- ▶ Withdrawal from social interactions and activities that you used to enjoy.

If your loved one was previously known to our medical social workers (MSW), or any healthcare institutions (e.g., hospices or nursing homes), you or your family may wish to approach them first.

However, if they are not previously known, you may choose to seek support from organisations that offer a range of grief and bereavement services by certified professionals. You may also approach a Family Service Centre (FSC) located near your residence.

---

▶ **CGH Medical Social Services (MSS)**

For bereaved families known to a Medical Social Worker (MSW).  
CGH Main Building: (65) 6850 2880/ 81  
The Integrated Building: (65) 6426 8600/ 01

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 5.30pm  
Saturday: 8.30am to 12.30pm

---

▶ **Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF)**

For bereaved parents and siblings of children with cancer who are CCF beneficiaries.

Children who lost their caregivers to cancer (the child must be aged 4 to 19 and have at least one parent who is a Singaporean/ Permanent Resident).

GB Point  
535 Kallang Bahru, #02-02 Singapore 339351  
Tel: (65) 6229 3701  
[www.ccf.org.sg](http://www.ccf.org.sg)

**Operating hours:**

Tuesday to Thursday: 9.00am to 5.30pm

---

▶ **Counselling and Care Centre (CCC)**

For English or Mandarin speaking preferences.

Hong Lim Complex  
Block 536 Upper Cross Street, #05-241 Singapore 050536  
Tel: (65) 6536 6366  
[www.counsel.org.sg](http://www.counsel.org.sg)

**Operating hours:**

Monday & Wednesday: 9.00am to 9.00pm  
Tuesday, Thursday, & Friday: 9.00am to 6.00pm

---

▶ **Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing**

For individuals above 50 years old.

Central Plaza  
298 Tiong Bahru Road, #15-01/ 06 Singapore 168730  
Tel: (65) 6593 9500 (by appointment only)  
[www.tsaofoundation.org](http://www.tsaofoundation.org)

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Thursday: 8.30am to 6.00pm  
Friday: 8.30am to 5.30pm

---

---

▶ **Life Point**

For caregivers and family members who have lost a relative. They should be a Singaporean or Permanent Resident. They cater to the English or Mandarin speaking.

Chinatown Point  
133 New Bridge Road, #04-08 Singapore 059413  
Tel: (65) 6538 9877  
[www.shenghong.org.sg/life-point/](http://www.shenghong.org.sg/life-point/)

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 9.00am to 1.00pm, 2.00pm to 6.00pm

---

▶ **Montfort Care**

For individuals as well as families who have lost their significant other (especially through a sudden and unexpected death).

Multiple locations including home-based support  
Helpline: (65) 8181 0448  
Email: [dyingmatters@montfortcare.org.sg](mailto:dyingmatters@montfortcare.org.sg)

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 9.00am to 6.00pm

---

▶ **O'Joy Care Services**

For any elderly person and/ or their caregivers with bereavement issues or individuals that are 18 years and above with mental health issues.

Block 5 Upper Boon Keng Road  
#02-10 Singapore 380005  
Tel: (65) 6749 0190  
[www.ojoy.org](http://www.ojoy.org)

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 8.00am to 5.30pm

---

▶ **SAGE Counselling Centre**

For family members or caregivers of the bereaved.

Jurong Point Shopping Centre  
1 Jurong West Central 2, #06-04 Singapore 648886  
Tel: (65) 6354 1191  
[www.sagecc.org.sg](http://www.sagecc.org.sg)

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 5.30pm

---

---

▶ **Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)**

Individuals facing a crisis, thinking about suicide and/ or affected by suicide.

10 Cantonment Close, #01-01 Singapore 080010

Tel: 1800 221 4444 (24-hour hotline)

Email befriending: pat@sos.org.sg

www.sos.org.sg

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 9.00am to 6.00pm

---

▶ **Viriya Community Services**

For individuals and families in the community.

72 Shrewsbury Road

Singapore 307837

Tel: (65) 6251 7797 (by appointment only)

www.viriya.org.sg

---

▶ **Wicare Support Group**

For widows and their children.

Junction 8, Office Tower

9 Bishan Place, #08-01 Singapore 579837

Tel: (65) 6354 2475

www.wicare.org.sg

**Operating hours:**

Monday to Friday: 9.00am to 6.00pm (Closed from 1.00pm to 2.00pm)

---





## References and resources

### Read about:

- ▶ **Post-death matters** by the *National Environment Agency (NEA)* at <https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/after-death/post-death-matters/when-death-occurs>



- ▶ **Coroner's Cases** by the *Health Sciences Authority (HSA)* at <https://www.hsa.gov.sg/about-us/applied-sciences/forensic-medicine>



- ▶ **Managing Grief** by the *Agency of Integrated Care (AIC)* at <https://www.aic.sg/caregiving/manage-emotions>



- ▶ **Caring for Yourself and Others After A Death** by the *Singapore Hospice Council* at <https://singaporehospice.org.sg/site2019/wp-content/uploads/Caringforyourselfandothers-web.pdf>



# Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Singapore  
General Hospital



Changi  
General Hospital



Sengkang  
General Hospital



KK Women's and  
Children's Hospital



National Cancer  
Centre Singapore



National Dental  
Centre Singapore



National Heart  
Centre Singapore



National  
Neuroscience Institute



Singapore National  
Eye Centre



SingHealth  
Community Hospitals



Polyclinics  
SingHealth

**PATIENTS. AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO.®**


2 Simei Street 3 Singapore 529889  
Tel: (65) 6788 8833 Fax: (65) 6788 0933  
Reg No 198904226R

### **CGH Appointment Centre**

For appointments and enquiries,  
please call: (65) 6850 3333

Operating hours:  
8.30 am to 5.30 pm (Monday to Friday)  
8.30 am to 12.30 pm (Saturday)  
Closed on Sunday & Public Holiday

For more information, please visit [www.cgh.com.sg](http://www.cgh.com.sg)

 [facebook.com/ChangiGeneralHospital](https://facebook.com/ChangiGeneralHospital)

Information is valid as of June 2022 and subject to revision without prior notice.

All information provided within this publication is intended for general information and is provided on the understanding that no surgical and medical advice or recommendation is being rendered. Please do not disregard the professional advice of your doctor.