



ⓈⓂ After-death Body Care

Have you ever had a friend or relative die and wished you could have kept them at home for a day or two, to take care of the body yourself and say your farewells without pressure? Well, you can, and caring for your deceased loved one at home is completely safe and simpler than it seems.

What will I need?

After-death care includes getting the body from the hospital or hospice (unless your person died at home), washing and dressing the body, keeping it cool and making or buying a simple shroud or casket. You will need:

- dry ice or Techni-Ice (for cooling)
- wash basin
- towels, washcloths
- bodywash
- moisturizer
- fresh sheets and pillowcases
- incontinence pads
- essential oils
- clothing/shroud/other covering

Many families choose to surround the body with sacred objects, flowers, incense or an essential oil diffuser immediately after death and want the body minimally disturbed. In this case, the family's personal preference is of higher importance than moving the body and gentle care can be taken to prevent disruption. Other families may opt to provide additional loving touches like shampooing hair, shaving the face, providing nail care, hair style and applying makeup.

The idea of providing after-death body care may be uncomfortable for some people. This is understandable, as we have become culturally alienated from caring for our dead and turning this work over to "experts." Body care, like many aspects of home-based after-death care, is a simple, practical task that might be compared to caring for an infant or bed-bound patient. It's not the mysterious and technically challenging undertaking it's sometimes made out to be and there are usually family members and friends willing to help.

Local Options & Support

Care of the body engages our hearts and minds in a compassionate way and gives our grief a place to go. After-death body preparation is a symbolic gesture of loving, hands-on care that is usually the last physical contact the family has with the deceased.

You may want to do some but not all of the after-death care yourself. If you'd like guidance, death doulas and home funeral guides are skilled at teaching these techniques. They can help you find loving and self-sufficient ways to navigate this process. Most death workers operate on a sliding scale between \$30-\$100/hour. You can also look for a funeral director in your area who is willing to perform specific tasks for a fee, instead of requiring their full package of services.

Whatever you choose, please take care of yourself, commit to only as much as you are able and willing to do, and keep in mind that there's no right or wrong way to do this tender and important work.