



Funeral options - make your end of life Your choice

Have you considered your own end of life options? Would you prefer to die at home surrounded by your family, or would you prefer medical professionals to do all they can to prolong your life? Would you like to be buried or cremated? Or what about other options? Did you even know there are other options?

The first thing to mention here is that traditional burials and cremations are not very environmentally friendly. In **traditional burial**, heavy metals and toxic chemicals from the body and coffin (which contains plastic, toxic glue, man-made fabrics and metal) leach into the soil and groundwater. It is important to note here that there is absolutely no requirement for a body to be embalmed unless the body is being transported a long distance or the funeral is delayed.

Flame cremation requires a large amount of fuel and releases carbon-based emissions. Around 78% of the UK population (2019) choose cremation over traditional burial – this amounts to around 150,000 tons of carbon dioxide being released per year. While some crematoriums have filtering systems to remove pollutants like mercury from fillings, and one could choose an eco-friendlier coffin, or rent a wooden coffin for viewing but not for burning, carbon emissions are still significant.

So, what other options are there?

Natural (or Green) Burial

With concerns over the environment, natural burial is becoming more popular as people choose to return their body to the earth in a more natural way. In many parts of the world, returning a body directly to the ground is what humans have been doing since ancient times and some religions, for example Islam and Judaism, require burial to be a natural process.

A natural burial uses materials and resources that have a minimal impact on the environment, for example there is no chemical embalming, there are no expensive coffin trimmings or grave liner and no gaudy headstones. Bodies are instead buried in a natural shroud or biodegradable container, allowing nutrients to be returned to the earth without contaminating it at the same time. Burial plots are either unmarked or marked with a natural stone/slate marker or a tree.

[Natural Burials – The Good Funeral Guide](#)





Resomation (alkaline hydrolysis or 'Water Cremation')

Resomation has about a tenth of the carbon footprint that flame cremation has and has been available in the USA & Canada since 2011. In England and Wales, recommendations are due by the Law Commission in spring of 2026 as to the legal framework for New Funerary Methods (including alkaline hydrolysis), while in Scotland the Government have already conducted a Consultation on alkaline hydrolysis with the aim of developing regulation.

Water Cremation imitates the same process a body goes through naturally when it is buried, but in a fraction of the time. The body is gently dissolved in a weak alkali solution, returning to its constituent elements, leaving only the bones which are then reduced to 'ash' to be passed back to the family.

The 'waste' liquid is assessed and treated before being returned to the water system. There are no harmful emissions like there are with flame cremation, less energy is used in the process and the resultant 'ash' is pure bone (and therefore much whiter than the remains from flame cremation).



[Resomation - Natural Water Cremation - an alternative to flame cremation](#)

[Kindly Earth – Return to nature](#)

[Dissolving dead bodies in WATER could save hundreds of thousands of tons of carbon dioxide | Daily Mail Online](#)

Human Composting

This is another of the New Funerary Methods currently being reviewed by the Law Commission. It's another environmentally friendly option that returns the body to the earth as compost. The body is mixed with natural organic materials such as woodchips and straw and placed in a closed vessel. A balance of carbon and nitrogen enables microbes to break down the body over a few weeks.

[Terramation UK: The Home of Human Composting in the UK – Find out more about Terramation and human composting in the UK](#)

Direct Cremation

Direct Cremation has become increasingly popular in recent years. It is an unattended cremation without a service and can be a cheaper alternative for families with smaller budgets. However, it is important to note that, choosing a direct cremation through one of the large online companies, who typically advertise their services on television, can mean that the body is collected and stored with others in an (unknown to you) facility, with no option to view, and you are unlikely to know when the cremation is taking place.



Using a local funeral director for a direct cremation gives you more control over the process. You will know where the body is being stored and when the cremation will take place (and they will only cremate one body at a time). There are also options to have a short, attended service, with just close family in attendance.

Alongside a direct cremation, the importance of holding a celebration of life or memorial ceremony must be emphasised in order to process one's grief.

[Direct cremation – The Good Funeral Guide](#)

Medical science

Those with an interest in medicine may choose to donate their body to be used in the education of future healthcare workers, for scientific research and the development or improvement of medical procedures. Unlike organ donation, only the person choosing to leave their body to medical science can consent to it. You would need to contact your local medical school well in advance and enter into a written agreement in order to be accepted.

[How To Donate Your Body To Science | Funeral Guide](#)

Other useful resources

I highly recommend the document '**Leaving Gracefully**', compiled by colleague and fellow funeral celebrant and end of life Doula, Beverley Bulmer. It is a comprehensive guide and notebook where you can record your end of life wishes to support your family and friends to carry them out. It includes personal and financial details, practicalities, people to notify, wishes before and after death and lots more.

[Leaving Gracefully | Preparing for End of Life Wishes](#)



The following guide to your **Legal rights and responsibilities** covers other frequently asked questions, for example 'Do I have to use a Funeral Director?' (no) and 'Where can a dead body be buried?'

[Your legal rights and responsibilities – The Good Funeral Guide](#)