

Evaluating Quality of Life

As your elder nears the end of life, you and other family members will probably be asking some serious questions about his or her quality of life. How long should life be extended? By what means? What can your elder experience now? Is the pain your elder is experiencing too great? How can the quality of your elder's final days be improved? How can you—or anyone else—determine or evaluate their quality of life?

The answers to these questions are intensely personal, and most likely will be answered within the family. Doctors, nurses, counselors, religious leaders, social workers and hospice workers will be able to provide some guidance support and pain relief. The quality-of-life decisions that underlie your family's decisions about medical care can be made only by the elder, or—if he or she is unable to make these decisions—by family members.



When evaluating a person's quality of life, take into account the level of pain they might be experiencing, the comfort of their surroundings and their awareness of others around them.

HERE ARE SOME GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR ELDER'S FINAL DAYS:

Pain

People suffering from debilitating and life-threatening illnesses often suffer excruciating pain, which can diminish the quality of life considerably. Advances in palliative treatment—treatment for the pain of the terminally ill—can ease this pain, improving a patient's quality of life during their final days. The pain of some illnesses, however, remains difficult to treat. Ask a doctor or hospice nurse for information about palliative treatment in the case of your elder.

Comfort

The quality of a person's final days can be much higher if they are in comfortable surroundings. It is estimated that as many as 80% of people die in the hospital, but it may not be the best place to die, given a choice. Although hospitals allow doctors to provide instantaneous and emergency treatment if required, they also are unfamiliar and sterile surroundings with unknown people. Find out if it is practical for your elder to spend his or her final days at home, which can significantly increase their level of comfort.

Awareness

When evaluating a person's quality of life, you must take into account their awareness of those around them, their surroundings and their situation. How aware is your elderly relative? How aware is she or he likely to become? Talk to a doctor about the degree to which your elder will regain or lose awareness, and the likelihood of his or her regaining some sense of self. Questions of awareness are difficult to answer, but the answers can help when evaluating someone's quality of life.