

Hospice Comfort Kits Explained: What They Include, How They Work, and Why They Matter

A guide for caregivers and hospice teams explaining what comfort kits are, what they may contain, and how they support prompt symptom relief.

BetterRX

THE SHORT ANSWER

A hospice comfort kit—sometimes called an emergency kit or e-kit—is a small supply of preselected medications kept in the patient's home to help manage symptoms that may develop or worsen quickly near the end of life. These may include pain, shortness of breath, anxiety, agitation, nausea, constipation, fever, or excessive oral secretions.

Comfort kits are typically dispensed in limited quantities after hospice admission or when a patient's needs change. They are designed to help provide timely symptom relief when waiting for a new prescription, pharmacy visit, or medication delivery could delay care.

What Might a Hospice Comfort Kit Include?

There is no universal hospice comfort kit. Contents are individualized based on the patient's needs, the hospice organization's clinical protocols, medication formulary, and applicable regulatory requirements.

Examples may include:

- Pain: A fast-acting opioid, such as concentrated liquid morphine, when clinically appropriate
- Shortness of breath: Often managed with the same opioid used to relieve pain and the sensation of air hunger
- Anxiety or agitation: A medication such as lorazepam, haloperidol, or other therapies selected based on the cause of symptoms
- Nausea or vomiting: An antiemetic such as promethazine or ondansetron

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- Excess oral secretions: Medications such as atropine or hyoscyamine that help reduce excessive secretions
 - Fever or general discomfort: An antipyretic such as acetaminophen, including a suppository formulation when swallowing becomes difficult
 - Constipation: A laxative or suppository when appropriate for the patient's condition and goals of care

Comfort kits may include liquid, sublingual, buccal, rectal, transdermal, or other formulations when clinically appropriate. The available route depends on the medication, the patient's condition, and the prescribing clinician's instructions.

Every comfort kit should include clear instructions describing when to use each medication and when to contact the hospice team.

Why Comfort Kits Matter for Patients and Families

Symptoms can change rapidly near the end of life. Having medications already available helps hospice teams respond quickly while reducing uncertainty for caregivers.

Comfort kits can support proactive hospice care by:

- Helping reduce the time between symptom onset and treatment
- Giving caregivers a clear, guided response during stressful situations
- Supporting hospice nurses as they guide caregivers by phone when clinically appropriate
- Potentially reducing avoidable after-hours prescription requests

For many families, simply knowing that a comfort kit is available provides reassurance, even if it is never used. Comfort kits do not replace ongoing symptom assessment, medication review, caregiver education, or communication with the hospice team. These remain essential throughout the patient's hospice journey.

When Are Comfort Kits Dispensed and Updated?

Timing varies by hospice policy and patient needs. Comfort kits may be dispensed:

- Shortly after hospice admission, once appropriate medication orders are in place
- When a patient's condition changes significantly
- When symptoms become more difficult to manage
- When a patient transitions to a different care setting
- When a patient's ability to swallow or use a particular medication route changes

Comfort kits should be reviewed regularly. As a patient's symptoms, swallowing ability, functional status, or goals of care evolve, the medications and formulations appropriate for the kit may also

change. The same clinical judgment that guides broader hospice medication management should guide ongoing comfort-kit review.

Compassionate Care, Ready When It's Needed

Comfort kits represent more than a box of medications. They reflect one of hospice care's guiding principles: anticipating symptoms whenever possible so patients can receive responsive, compassionate relief.

When appropriate medications are available in the home and caregivers know how to use them, patients may experience faster symptom relief and families may feel better supported.

BetterRX helps hospice organizations strengthen comfort-kit programs through clinical pharmacy expertise, hospice-focused technology, and coordinated medication workflows that support ready access to comfort medications.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is included in a hospice comfort kit?

When should a hospice comfort kit be used?

Use the kit only according to instructions from the hospice team. Contact the hospice nurse when symptoms are new, severe, rapidly worsening, or not improving.

Can caregivers give medications from a comfort kit?

Caregivers may administer medications when the hospice team has provided clear instructions and the medication has been prescribed for the individual patient. Caregivers should not change the dose or frequency without direction from the hospice team.

Where should a hospice comfort kit be stored?

Store medications according to pharmacy labels and hospice instructions. Keep the kit labeled, secure, and out of reach of children and visitors.

Does every hospice patient receive a comfort kit?

Not necessarily. Comfort-kit practices vary by hospice organization, patient needs, clinical judgment, medication protocols, and pharmacy availability.
