

## Post-death Physical Care

[Further information can be found in the [Post-Death Care/Home Funeral Care videos](#). We also recommend the webpage [Special Circumstances in Home Care of the Body](#).]

**Please note:** Links in this PDF appear as underlined green text, just as on [CINDEA's](#) website. [In some cases, the name of a section of a webpage or a PDF appears in green but not underlined; these are not actual links.] If you are having difficulty making the links work, click on the Hand icon (which looks like a cartoon outline of a person's hand) in your PDF reader. The Hand icon can be found on the toolbar that begins with an yellow-orange file-folder icon at the top of your screen, just below the menu bar.

### Supplies for Dealing with the Post-Death Physical Care

- **Protection** — Gloves, masks, if any concern about infections or contagious wounds/etc.; bandages/etc. (for re-bandaging any wounds or unhealed incisions); garden gloves (with rubber-tipped fingers) for handling dry ice. [Note: dry ice will cause frostbite, if hands are not well protected. A heavy cloth can be used instead for handling the dry ice, but there is more chance of touching a small bit of the ice. ]
- **Several sheets**
  - a plastic one to protect the mattress (a shower curtain, a drop cloth, or a couple of large plastic garbage bags can be used instead) or Chux pads (the kind used in hospital to protect the mattress);
  - regular sheets both under and over the body — including an extra one between the dry ice and the body;
  - extras for after the body-washing (as they will get wet);
  - a sheet over a Death Journeyer who chooses to be 'returned as they were born' (naked).
  - A favourite quilt can also be used to cover the body and/or to shroud it in (if there is to be a Green Burial, it must be made from a biodegradable material).
- **Towels** — surrounding and under the body while washing it, and to dry the body; to lift chin up or tie around head (if used to close mouth); an old one to catch bladder and bowel contents (or use adult diapers and condoms for released body fluids).
- **Washing equipment** — wide basin, watering can/small buckets, antibacterial/antimicrobial soap, washcloths (good to have several for different parts of the body), shampoo/conditioner, fragrant oils for the rinsing water, vinegar or mouthwash and Q-tip swabs.
- **Cooling the body** — dry ice and Styrofoam container for storing it; 6-10 brown paper bags (to put dry ice in — assuming one initial placement, and one replacement); fans; frozen gel packs for small children or emaciated elders (dry ice is too strong for their body mass) or to initially start cooling the body.
- **Dressing the body** — clean clothes set aside for this purpose; shroud (if a Green Burial, clothes or shroud need to be made entirely from biodegradable materials) or sheet/quilt to cover body (if Death Journeyer chooses to be buried naked).
- **Pillow to rest head and shoulders** — this both presents a more comfortable look to your loved one, and stops any fluids from the lungs from dribbling out of the mouth.

### Moving the body

**Moving the body to wash it** Have the body, resting face up, on a narrow table or bed (which is wide enough to allow you to shift the body onto its side). Once the front parts of the body have been washed, have 2-3 people lift one side (primarily pushing on the shoulders and hips) to a 45 degree angle or more, and hold the body there, while others wash the back on that side. It can also be helpful to bend the knee that is uppermost, as this will give you the opportunity to hold the lower part of the body up 'through the legs', which may give you a more sturdy hold. [See the videos under [Post-Death Care & Home-Funeral YouTube Videos](#) on the [Post-Death Care](#) page for a clearer idea.]

*Moving the body from one place to another* It is possible to move the body just using the sheets below it — although wise to have several sheets, especially if your loved one is heavy. It requires 6-8 people (depending on the weight and size of your loved one), with one extra person supporting the head at the top. Roll the two long edges of the sheet up to the edge of the body, so that they provide something substantial for the carriers to grab onto (see the video on "Moving the body" under [Post-Death Care & Home-Funeral YouTube Videos](#) on the [Post-Death Care](#) page). If you are planning on using a decorated cardboard coffin, it should suffice for moving the body. [Note: cardboard coffins come in different sizes, so make sure that you get one that will fit your loved one.] You may want to secure the body into the coffin, if you are concerned about it shifting about — if you are covering the Death Journeyer with a sheet or quilt in the coffin, this can be done by placing rolled towels/etc. under the sheet/quilt in between the body and the coffin edges.

Especially if the Death Journeyer has chosen a shroud (in which case, there may be no coffin), a simple stretcher can also be used. Stretchers are usually available for rent from distributors of emergency or outdoor-living supplies; or you might rent a more complex hospital/rescue stretcher (usually with legs and wheels) from medical and rescue-supply stores. If you plan to use a plain, undecorated cardboard coffin, it may be possible to rent a wooden coffin and put the cardboard coffin into it — for the sake of ease of moving the body, and also in order to have something more formal-looking for visitation/lying-in/etc. However, a rented coffin should probably not be used for a shrouded body, as you can't be 100% sure that there would be no leakage of body fluids.

We recommend watching Donna Belk's [Moving the Body](#) video, as moving a body is somewhat difficult to explain in words. The video also includes examples of painting a cardboard coffin.

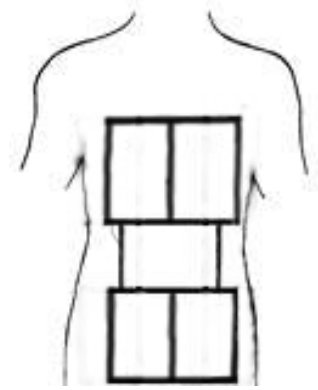
## Using dry ice and gel packs

*Sources of dry ice* Dry ice will keep the body below 48 F °/9 C ° — the required temperature for an un-embalmed body. Dry ice may be available at a grocery store (check the fish department, if you can't find a sign for it), or at a store that specializes in dry ice (check your Yellow Pages, or google for 'dry ice supplies' and your city). You will need 20-50 pounds of dry ice initially (depending on the size of the body), and the same amount for at least one replacement. It comes in bricks, typically 10 pounds per brick.

*Storage and handling of dry ice* If you are not using it immediately, dry ice should be stored in a Styrofoam box — it would crack a plastic one. Even if it is well insulated in the container, it will evaporate within about 3 days, so you may need to buy another batch of it on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Fill any spaces in the Styrofoam box with crumpled newspaper to insulate it further and reduce the evaporation of the dry ice. You will also need heavy rubber or leather gloves to handle the dry ice, as it causes frostbite (regular surgical or kitchen gloves don't have thick enough palms and fingertips). Package the dry-ice bricks in doubled brown-paper bags, one 10-pound brick per package. Alternatively, the dry ice can be broken — once it is packaged in brown-paper, put it into a pillow and hit it with a hammer or drop it on the floor several times. [Note: Dry ice evaporates from a solid directly into carbon-dioxide gas and does not leave any melted fluids. This gas is harmless, but can make you feel as if you are not getting enough oxygen if it is too concentrated.]

*Gel packs* Frozen gel packs are better for small children and very emaciated adults — dry ice is too cold for the minimal mass of their bodies. Gel packs can also be used temporarily for adults, while dry ice is being purchased.

**Placement of dry ice** The body should be washed and dressed first, and then moved to where it will be lying-in-honour (for the next 2-4 days). The packaged dry-ice bricks should be placed between two sheets — one protecting the mattress, and the other protecting the body. Roll the body over onto one side, and place the packages under the trunk of the body. If the body is smaller, you may only need 3 packages — if larger or heavier, 5 packages may be needed. Use only enough to cool the body — the flesh should remain flexible, not stiff. [See the diagram for a typical placement. It is the torso that needs to be cooled — the extremities do not matter.] Make sure, however, that the room is well ventilated so that the carbon dioxide released from the dry ice has a chance to escape — dry ice is safe to use, but creates a gas that can make breathing feel difficult.



The first placement of dry ice will be used up in cooling the body to the correct temperature, and will have evaporated in about 24 hours. Hence, the dry ice needs to be replaced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day. Once the body is cool, the second placement will last much longer — probably for 2-3 days. It is not likely that it will need to be replaced again, unless the body stays at home for 4 days or longer. Most often, the Death Journeyer will be buried/cremated on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day — unless this is not possible for the cemetery or crematorium, or some family members have not yet been able to say their ‘goodbyes’.

## Shrouding the body

The word ‘shroud’ comes from Old English *scrud*, which means ‘garment’. Simple one-sheet shrouds may have been one of the oldest casings for a dead body. Those who choose a green burial may prefer a shroud, as it allows the body to decompose quicker and more gracefully.

There are many ways of shrouding a body besides the wound-strips version that we are familiar with from ancient mummies. Some are more like clothes that cover all parts of the body, such as traditional Jewish *tahrihim*. Others may be a simple large sheet (or several) wrapped around the body, much as we would wrap a parcel; or can be made as a cloth body-bag. Some shrouds are sewn closed — others might use ties or other kinds of fasteners.

A shroud may have one or multiple layers — three is common. They may be of any material — but to be biodegradable, natural fibres such as cotton, silk or linen are best. If a rougher material is used for the outer shroud, you may wish the inner layers to be softer as a sign of respect. In some traditions, one’s favourite quilt is the outer shroud. The Death Journeyer may choose to be shrouded in their regular bedsheets (if clean, and of a biodegradable fabric).

[Further specifics at [The Shrouding](#) and [How to Wrap a Body in a Shroud](#). We were unable to find any YouTube videos showing how to do a general shrouding of a dead body: however, many videos are available on the traditional Islamic styles of shrouding, which are what you are likely to find by googling “YouTube, shrouding a body”.]

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OR if you find out any relevant information (not already on our site) about your province/territory or municipality.

Notes: