Academy of
Aid-in-Dying Medicine
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Preparing Aid-in-Dying Medications for Oral Self-Administration

The aid-in-dying day can be very stressful, and it is important that whoever is preparing the medications feel as confident as possible. This guide provides clear, step-by-step instructions so everyone can understand what is involved.

The Academy strongly recommends that a knowledgeable clinician take primary responsibility for preparing the medications, for example, a hospice nurse, trained end-of-life doula, or experienced volunteer. This helps keep the process safe and organized and allows family members, even those who are very capable, to focus on being present for this important, tender time with their loved one rather than managing detailed technical tasks.

If you feel you may need more support at any point, please contact the prescribing provider or your hospice team for guidance; in many communities, trained end-of-life doulas or volunteers are available to manage this complex task and to provide calm, reassuring bedside support.

Supplies that you will need

- Paper towels or a chux pad
- Gloves, mask, and a small plastic trash bag
- A short glass cup (easy to drink from without tipping back too far)
- A measuring cup with ounce and cup markings
- 8 ounces of clear, filtered apple juice
- A straw, if needed
- A spoon for stirring
- Non-fat popsicles or non-fat sorbet (kept in the freezer until needed)

Important notes before you start

- Check the label on the medication bottle for how much apple juice to use (for example, 2 ounces = 1/4 cup, or 4 ounces = 1/2 cup).
- These medications are dense powders and will not fully dissolve; some powder will always sink to the bottom.
- Because they settle quickly, you will need to shake the capped bottle several times to keep the powder mixed into the juice.
- The mixture can taste bitter and may cause a burning feeling in the mouth and throat.
- Practicing drinking 2-4 ounces from the short cup within 2 minutes, once or twice a day for a few days before, can make the actual day easier.
- A non-fat popsicle or small spoonful of sorbet just before and just after the medications can help numb the mouth and add a bit of sweet comfort.

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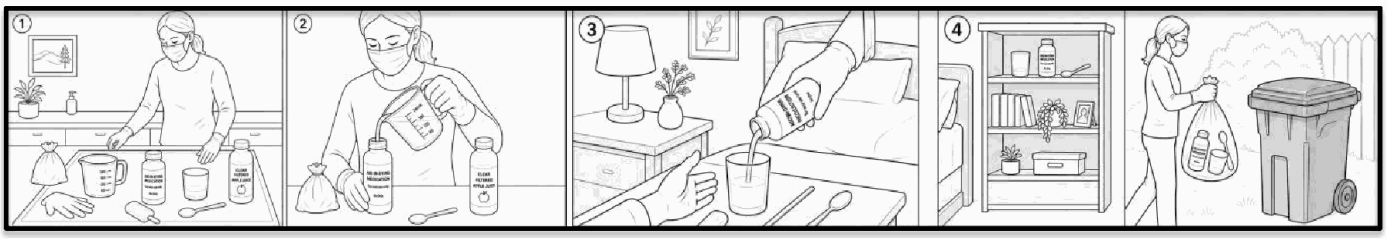
Preparing the Medications



Step 1: Set up the space

- Choose a clean, quiet area away from pets and children, ideally near a sink for easy clean-up.
- Lay down paper towels or a chux pad on your work surface.
- Put on your mask and gloves. Place the small plastic trash bag nearby.

Step 2: Mix the medications with apple juice

1. Measure and pour the apple juice into the measuring cup and set it aside.
2. Pick up the medication bottle and, while it is still capped, gently tap the bottom so the powder settles away from the cap.
3. Keeping the bottle on the counter, remove the cap and slowly pour about half of the measured apple juice into the bottle, then recap it.
4. Shake the capped bottle strongly for at least 30 seconds.
5. Uncap the bottle and pour in the rest of the apple juice. If the bottle cannot hold all of it, pour the extra juice into the short glass.
6. Recap the bottle and shake again, checking the bottom of the bottle to be sure the powder is mixed in; keep shaking if you still see powder.

Step 3: Clean up and bring the capped bottle of prepared medications to the bedside

1. Put any used paper towels, gloves, or masks into the small plastic trash bag and keep it out of reach until you can throw it away.
2. Take the capped medication bottle (and any extra apple juice), the short glass, straw (if needed), spoon, and the popsicles or sorbet to the bedside.

Right before the patient takes the medications

1. Have the patient suck on the cold popsicle or have a few spoonsful of non-fat sorbet to cool their mouth and tongue.
2. When the patient is ready, shake the capped bottle again for at least 30 seconds.
3. Uncap the bottle and carefully pour the mixture into the short glass. Offer it to the patient, using a straw if that is easier for them.
4. If they need more time, gently stir the mixture with the spoon to keep the powder mixed into the juice.
5. Encourage them to drink all of the mixture within 2-3 minutes.
6. Once the patient has finished the medication, place the cup, spoon, and bottle somewhere out of reach.
7. Offer sips of juice or a non-fat popsicle or sorbet to help with any lingering bitterness or burning in the mouth.

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What to expect after the patient takes the medications

After drinking the medication, most people become sleepy within five to ten minutes and then enter a comfortable coma. Their breathing may slow and seem to pause, and their skin color may change; they may also take a few very deep, sudden breaths that can look alarming, but they will not be aware of these changes and will not feel discomfort. For many, breathing and the heart slow down and stop over the next several hours; for some, this can take longer if their body absorbs the medication more slowly. They remain comfortable during this time. Once there have been no breaths for 10 minutes, and you cannot feel any heartbeat in their neck, the patient has died.

Step 4: After the patient has died

- When you are ready, collect the materials from the bedside.
- Wash, rinse, and dry the cup and spoon completely.
- Place the capped bottle and any used or contaminated supplies into the plastic bag and take it directly to the outside garbage (for example, the curbside bin), rather than the kitchen trash, in case anything leaks.

More support is available

If you feel you may need more support, please contact the prescribing provider for guidance. Trained end-of-life doulas or volunteers are often available to help with preparing the medications and to provide calm, reassuring bedside support.

The Academy of Aid-in-Dying Medicine is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit

Our mission is to develop and promote best practices for the care of patients considering or completing medical aid in dying, so patients and families receive safe, compassionate, evidence-based support at the end of life.

To learn more or to donate, please visit us at **AADM.org**

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