



 Dying to  
Understand 

**SURVIVAL KIT -  
ESSENTIALS OF DYING**

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## Surviving death

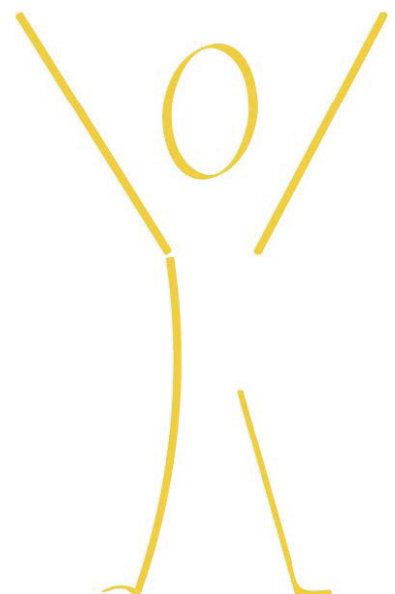
Have you ever thought about what it takes to survive death?

This may seem a ridiculous question because no one survives death, but there is more to this subject than meets the eye.

There are two sides to death that need to be survived. The first is dying: this includes all the events and actions that ultimately result in death. Dying is a journey of loss, a rear-guard action away from life and one that needs a survival plan.

The second are all the events that follow death. Death is supposed to be the ultimate final bell and *game over* moment, but it isn't. Although it certainly is final, there are no second chances after death – it is anything but *game over*.

The ripple effects after death continue longer than expected. Bereavement can take months to resolve, and the deceased estate can take even longer. For some people the *game* is never over, and they suffer the consequences of death permanently.



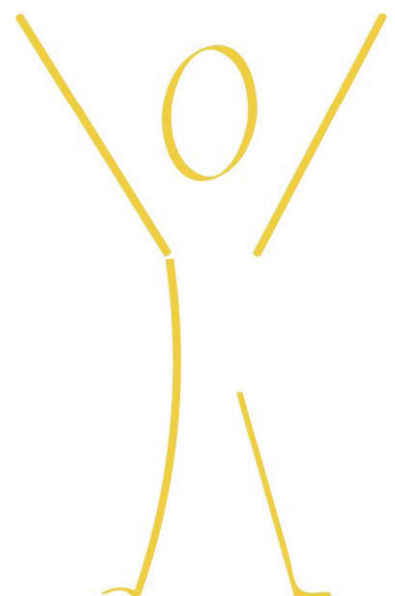


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Death is not easy or simple, like turning off a light. It is more like a massive destructive cyclone heading our way in the future. There is nothing we can do to prevent it, but there is a lot we can do to minimise the destruction it causes.

In life, we have a disaster management plan for all kinds of misadventures. We have fire extinguishers at home in case of a fire. We have insurance policies for unexpected damage to our goods. We have risk management strategies for all kinds of unexpected disasters, even though they may never occur.

But death will occur, and for that day, hopefully in the distant future, we need a plan. Here are our tips for surviving death.



## Tip 1 - Become informed

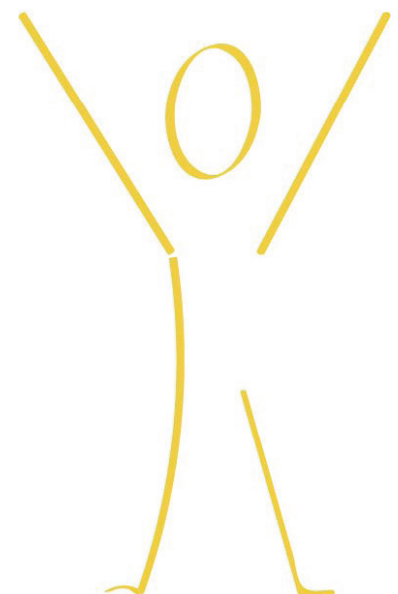
Most people prepare for death by ignoring it.

Throughout our research\*, we discovered that people were woefully unprepared for death and dying. They did not know what to do or expect when life was ending. They made it up as they went along and as a result, they made mistakes.

\*MSc Thesis

At the end of our research, we discussed death education with focus groups and there was a unanimous plea for a resource on dying, something like, *Dying for Dummies*.

We responded to their request and produced the book, *Death, Dying and Donuts*. This is an essential resource that covers all aspects of dying. If you would like to be informed on making the most of you or your loved one's last days in practical and emotional ways, read this book! Available at [deathdyinganddonuts.com](http://deathdyinganddonuts.com).



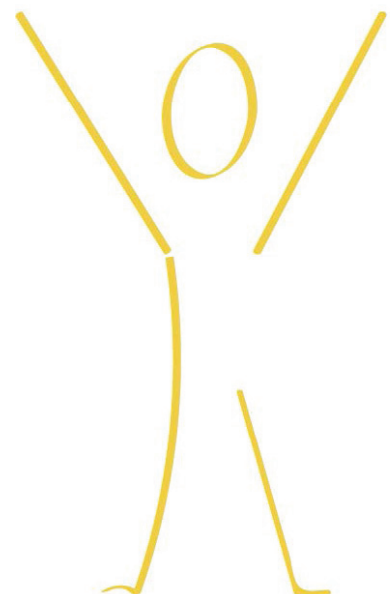
## Tip 2 – Make use of your time

I used to love watching the TV program *MasterChef*. In this cooking competition, cooks with enormous cooking talent compete against each other and against the clock. They must create a culinary masterpiece in a defined time. In the beginning, those with stand-out cooking talents pass the heats and go through to the finals where all contestants are equally talented. The winners in this section are often those with excellent time management skills. The final five minutes in the kitchen are usually chaotic. The final winners are usually those who had a game plan from the beginning.

In life, we are also competing against the clock. At the beginning of our life, we are unaware of the time constraint. Our priorities are not set by the clock. But when time is running out and we have been given the final 'five-minute call', it is chaotic. This is not the time to *begin* planning the strategy in life, it is time to *complete* the strategy.

Regardless of how much time you have left, make it a priority to have your will up to date and to have your affairs in order\*. Pay attention to those things that matter most. Make time for fun. Make time to enjoy life. Even in the most terrible of circumstances, find time to do something you enjoy. For me, it's eating donuts – I enjoy them. I can have a donut every day. What do you enjoy? Make time for it. Use your time wisely.

\*see Death, Dying and Donuts



### Tip 3 – Understand where you are on the journey

You can put it in your diary. At some point in life, we all have an appointment with death. It may be the death of a loved one or perhaps our own struggle with mortality.

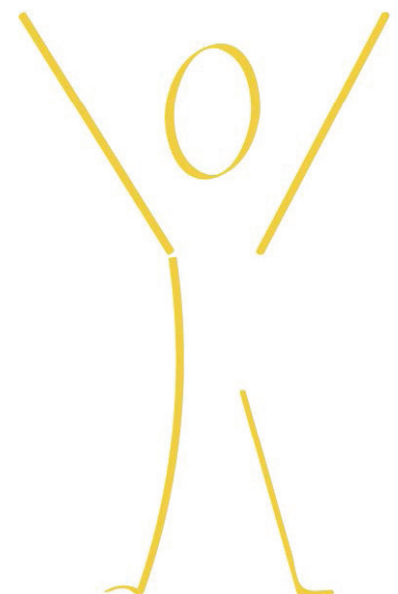
The wisdom here is to know where you are on the journey.

As a general concept, the health-journey in life can be divided into four phases.

The first is the healthy phase. Illness is never a consideration.

The second is the illness phase. Things go wrong. Pneumonias and appendicitis, ingrown toenails and so on. The possibilities of things that can go wrong are endless. For the most part, things head back into the healthy phase, or they may grumble along as chronic illness. Sometimes the illness is serious, and it can't be cured. This introduces the palliative phase of life.

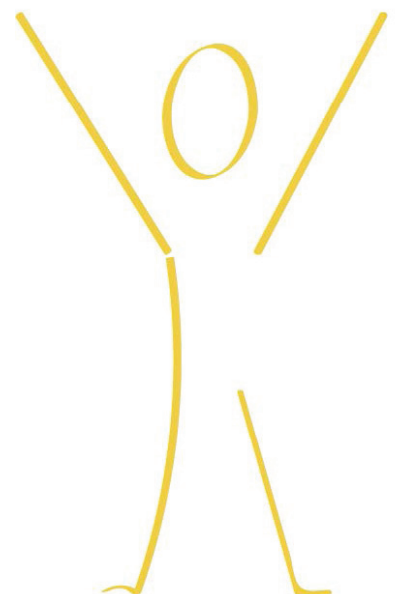
In the palliative phase of life, illness is a part of life, and it is not going away.



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The goals are to live as well as possible for as long as possible. Both quality and quantity are considerations regardless of what it takes. This is the time to consider palliative treatment if it works. This can be a very difficult time because of the desire to live better and longer. This is the time to fight to live.

The final phase of life is the dying phase. This is when treatments are no longer offering palliation and the body is beginning to fail. It is a time of frailty, decreased energy, decreased appetite and loss of independence due to illness. This is no longer the time to fight. It is the time to make peace and be at peace.



## Tip 4 - Make peace

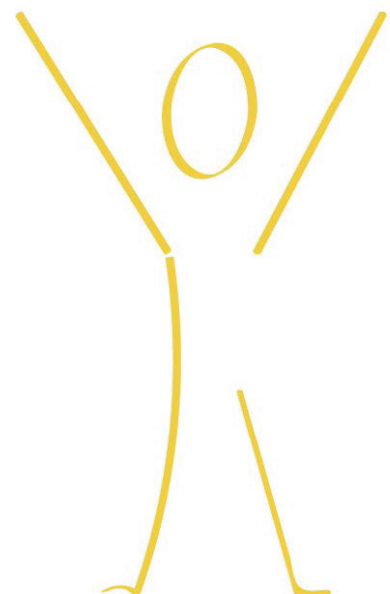
With the wisdom of knowing where you are on the journey, there comes a time to make peace with death.

Ideally, we need to make peace with death while we are young and healthy. Death is not the enemy; it is a normal part of life and something that will happen at the right time in the future. This does not mean we have to embrace death, but there is also no point in fighting it.

I am all for trying to avoid death. Live a healthy life, eat good food, exercise. Listen to your doctors and your body. Do chemotherapy and radiation if you are fighting cancer. Consider complementary health advice. Do what it takes to live better and longer. Stay healthy and if you can't, stay alive.

But when this plan fails, and if you have not made peace yet, it is time to make peace. When life is ending it is time to relax. This is the time to spend with friends and family. It is a time of reflection and thanksgiving, a time to love and to be loved.

It is time to make peace with the past.  
It is time to make peace with people.  
It is time to make peace with God.  
It is time to be at peace.





## Tip 5 – Build a team

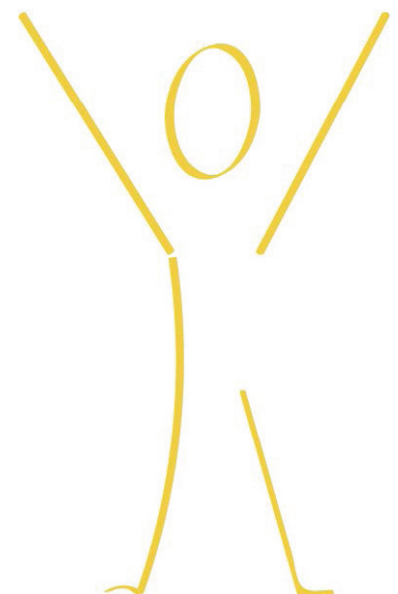
I would love to be good at everything, but I am not. I am a hopeless handyman, and I cannot tell the difference between a left or right-handed screwdriver. I rely on talented people to help me in life, and I am more than happy to pay them for their expertise and service. It is worth it!

I have my regular team of trusted people around me. My lawyer, plumber, electrician, dentist, doctor and so the list goes on. They are people whom I trust, and they trust me. I have their numbers on speed dial if there is ever an emergency.

When it comes to death and dying, it is important to have a team around you who you can trust. Your partner, carer, lawyer, doctor, friend, and the pizza delivery guy. Add to this list a palliative care specialist if you can, and a counsellor\*.

\*Psychologist, counsellor, spiritual leader

When you have your team, make use of them. Rely on them, that's what they are there for. Reward them for their help. Be thankful, be respectful and be kind. If you do, they will be happy to stay part of your team. Spend time building an awesome team.

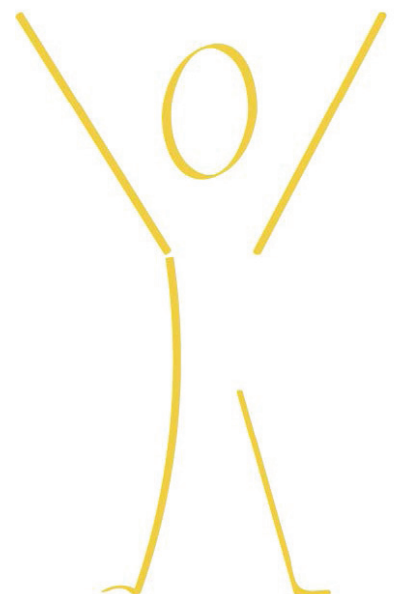


## Tip 6 – Attend to your spirituality

This may be a newsflash for some, but the truth is that we are spiritual beings. Our soul is not going to end when our physical body ends. There is evidence to suggest that at the time of death, our soul will leave our body and then...

What do you think happens to your soul when you die?

Don't wish for the best. Make provision for the welfare of your soul. Please get in touch if you are not sure where to start or if you have any questions about spirituality.



## Tip 7 – Ask for help

You may have heard the expression, “It is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.”

When it comes to illness, being stoic, a martyr or a hero is not part of a winning strategy. The way to win is to be noticed and to ask for help, even if you think you don’t need it.

There are surprisingly many community and public health resources to tap into if you are on the palliative journey. Link into a palliative care service early and find out how they can help. They do not judge you and they will not harm you.

Don’t survive death on your own. Get in touch with someone, anyone who can share the burden and lighten the load. We are here to help. Get in touch.

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