**Natural care for the tūpāpaku/body**

This is a natural extension of the care you gave your loved one in life. If your loved one has died in a hospital or rest home or under the care of hospice it is likely the body will have been bathed, but you may like to do another body washing for the healing experience this ritual will give you and your family. “Without exception, people who have washed a loved one after death tell me it has given them a sense of completeness, and a feeling or fulfilling their responsibility to the deceased.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Washing and laying out the body:**

Create a sacred space for this ritual. Cover any medical equipment, light a candle, have flowers, play music, sing, say a prayer or blessing. You may like to spray the room with lavender or some other oil which will relax the people taking part.

Lay at least two sheets or a plastic liner and two layers of towels under the body. Run a line of towels along either side to keep it stable.

When the body is moved for the first time there may be a groaning noise. Don’t be alarmed. This is just the last release of air.

**Rigor mortis** is a stiffening of the muscles. It sets in about three hours after the death, so it is easier to dress the body before then. The stiffness will lessen after 24

Elevate the head with a small pillow to tilt it forward, and place a small rolled up towel under the chin. This will close the mouth if it is open. The towel can be removed after a couple of hours. Alternatively you can lop a scarf or sash underneath the chin and tie it tightly at the top of the head, removing it after a couple of hours.

Hold the eyelids gently closed for a couple of minutes with the pads of your thumbs. If they won’t stay shut, you can use a rice pack or a Steri-Strip from the eyelid to the cheek. It can also help to massage cream into the eyes as the eyelids will be dehydrated and this will help them stretch. You can just lift the eyelid and put some Vaseline underneath too.

Some bodies will release bodily fluids so you will need to press down gently on the pelvic area to empty the bowel or bladder. Use of a sanitary pad under the genital area is essential and some people choose to use an adult nappy. Then throw away the soiled pads and wash the body.

Depending on the cause of death, fluid may have collected in the lungs and drain out of the mouth when turning or moving the person. Be ready with a cloth at hand, and keep the head elevated during the vigil. You do not need to place cotton in the nasal throat and/or anal passages, unless it is a cultural requirement.

It the body has open wounds, attend to them as you would a living body, with gloves and standard hygiene practices.

Have flannels and a bowl of warm water sprinkled with essential oils such as frankincense or mandarin. Take particular care to clean the genital area. You can use a hand sanitiser to rub your hands and any areas you feel need an extra cleaning. Two people need to hold the body on its side while you wash the back area and replace any soiled nappy or pad.

**Turning the body from the back to the side**[[2]](#footnote-2):

* Have two people stand on opposite sides of the bed
* Untuck the sheet, roll edges and grip tightly
* Together lift the sheet with the body to one side of the bed, making sure it isn’t too close to the edge
* The person furthest from the body should place the far ankle over the near ankle in the direction you want to turn, cross and tuck arms over their chest in the direction you want to turn, move the pillow in that direction, place your hands on the shoulder and hips furthest away and roll them towards you.

You can wash the hair if needed. Cut a hole in a corner of a plastic rubbish bag and place the open end under the back of the head and the part with the hole cut aimed into a bucket to catch the water. Fill up a jug of water and massage shampoo and rinse. If you use a sulphate free shampoo, there will be fewer suds.

After washing you can massage and moisturise the skin. You can use cotton buds to gently oil finger and toenails. You might like to shave a man and trim nose and ear hair.

Dress the body and do the hair, nails, make-up as your loved one used to do for themselves.

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| **Items you will need** | **Optional** |
| Small pillow | Candles |
| Two sheets | Music |
| Tie/scarf/bandage to keep mouth closed | Baby wipes |
| Flannels, towels | Medical gloves |
| Large bowl for bathing water | Hairdryer |
| Large jug for hair water | Steri strip tape |
| Rice eye pillow | Lip balm (lips may become dry) |
| Incontinence pads/adult nappies | Scissors |
| Essential oils or soaps | Large cloths to cover any medical equipment, decorate the room |
| Large rubbish bag | Vaseline |
| Bucket |  |
| Cotton buds/cotton balls |  |
| Moisturisers |  |
| Shampoo |  |
| Brush/comb |  |
| tweezers |  |
| Shaving kit  |  |
| Nail clippers/nose/ear hair trimmer |  |

The significance of the term: **Ngā Pou Herenga**. (as explained by Pouroto Ngaropa)

**Ngā Pou**- refers to many pillars of strength, like a pou whakairo, their strength, their courage. Pou where a way where iwi, hapū were able to tell their tribal cultural narratives but also seen as an  embodiment of these ancestors. That is why a name like ngā pou summarises our guides characteristics and role as very special, important and of great value.

**Herenga**means to bound, tie or connect which as ngā pou herenga, their job is to connect that of the person deceased who has departed from the Kauwae raro (physical world) to the Kauwae runga) ascend to the spiritual upper most heavens or spiritual realms.

So the term ngā pou herenga is very appropriate for the guides as their role is to take care of the departed, to prepare the person as they transition to the next journey of their life.  And our guides are noted as people with this type of strength, mana, strong, agile, sharing compassion and aroha to the whanau in times of need, so our guides need to be a person of this stamina, in our line of mahi.

1. McJorrow, Gail (2015, 2017 reprint) Better Send Off, pp 37 Mākaro Press, Wellington [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Death Centre handout, New South Wales [↑](#footnote-ref-2)