

Summary of Main Faiths and Cultures

Please remember these are only guidelines. All faiths hold human life to be sacred, so when life is endangered, any religious observance which interferes with assistance may need to be overruled. For example, it is not always possible to be treated or assisted by a member of the same sex. You may need to touch or hold someone who is distressed. The most important thing is to respond humanely.

Faith or Culture	Likely languages in UK	Diet	Dress	Physical contact	Medical treatment	Dying	Death customs
Baha'i	Mainly English, also Arabic and Farsi.	Baha'is do not normally drink alcohol, but may take it within medicine if prescribed by doctors.	No special dress code.	Baha'is are unlikely to object to being touched or treated by members of the opposite sex	No special requirements	No special religious requirements, but a family member or friend may read the Baha'i scriptures Baha'is believe in an after-life.	The body is washed and wrapped in white silk/cotton and a special ring placed on the finger of those aged 15 upwards. The body should not be embalmed and should be buried in a durable coffin within an hour's travelling time from place of death. A special prayer for the dead is said.
Buddhist	English, Cantonese, Hakka, Japanese, Thai, Tibetan, Sinhalese	Often vegetarian or vegan. Salads, rice, vegetables and fruit are usually acceptable	No special dress code for lay Buddhists.	A Buddhist may be touched by a person of either sex for comfort, treatment and medical examinations.	No special requirements	Many Buddhists wish to maintain a clear mind when dying. They may want to have quiet, or time with another Buddhist chanting sacred texts. Non-Buddhists should treat the dying person mindfully. Buddhists believe in rebirth/reincarnation.	The body of the deceased may be handled by non-Buddhists. Many Buddhists believe that the soul does not immediately leave the body after death, so it is important to treat the corpse as a person not as an object. It should be moved as little as possible.
Chinese (Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Taoist.)	Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, Hokkien, English	Cow's milk is avoided. Rice is the staple diet with lots of freshly cooked vegetables, fish and very little meat.	Both men and women usually wear shirt/blouse and trousers / slacks	Women usually prefer to be treated by women.	Injections are preferred to pills	Usually family members gather at the bedside, so it is important that the dying person is not left alone. Although beliefs about the after-life vary according to faith, all respect their ancestors.	Undertakers handle the deceased after death. Chinese people are usually embalmed and are dressed in their best clothes. White is the colour of mourning. Grief may be expressed loudly.
Christian	English, and many other languages	Generally, all foods are permissible. Some follow Jewish customs. Some are vegetarian. Some are forbidden to use alcohol and other stimulants.	Most have no dress code except for clergy and members of religious orders. Some women cover their heads.	Most Christians would have no objection to being touched by members of the opposite sex.	Some may decline conventional medical treatments. Some have special procedures regarding blood transfusions.	Some appreciate quiet; others value prayers or scriptures being read. Some may require Holy Communion and / or the Sacrament of the Sick. Christians believe in the resurrection.	Choice of cremation or burial is personal. The wishes of the family should be sought
Hindu	English, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil	Hindus do not eat beef. Some Hindus are strictly vegetarian and also avoid fish, eggs and animal fat. Salads, rice, vegetables, yoghurt, milk products and fruit are acceptable.	Modesty and decency are essential.	Some Hindus would prefer to be comforted or treated by someone of the same sex.	Generally no special requirements, though some Hindus prefer Ayurvedic medicine.	Most fatally ill Hindus would want to pray with a mala (rosary). The dying person may prefer the company of someone of the same sex. Hindus believe in re-incarnation.	The body should be undressed and washed, preferably by someone of the same sex. Jewellery and religious items should not be removed. Hindu bodies should be placed together with head facing north and feet south, arms placed to the sides and legs straightened.
Humanist	English or any other language.	No particular requirements. Some Humanists are vegetarian or vegan	No particular requirements	No specific restrictions on physical contact	No special requirements.	Humanists prefer to have family or close friends with them. They might object to prayers being said or reassurance given based on belief in God or afterlife.	No specific requirements. Many Humanists request a non-religious celebration for their dead.
Jain	English, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Tamil.	No alcohol, meat, fish, poultry or eggs. Salads, fruits, grain, vegetables, bread or biscuits made without eggs or dairy products are acceptable. Some do not eat root vegetables or honey.	Unless they are monks or nuns. Jains may follow a western dress code, while avoiding leather. Females may dress traditionally.	Jains may prefer to be treated by people of the same sex.	Blood transfusions and organ transplants are acceptable if these are not at the expense of another life	Jains seek mental detachment from all desires and wish to concentrate on the inner self. Jains believe in reincarnation.	No specific rituals. Bodies are always cremated and never buried except for infants
Japanese (Buddhist, Shinto, Christian)	Japanese, English	Preference for rice	No religious requirements	Japanese people may prefer to be treated by people of the same sex.	No religious requirements	Dying Japanese may wish to meditate.	Preference for cremation.

This information has been prepared by Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE). For more information, see our individual entries or visit SIFRE's web site www.sifre.org.uk or contact the SIFRE Centre by phone 01473 343661 (out of hours emergency number 01379 678615) or email aa@sifre.org.uk.

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Jewish	English, Hebrew, Yiddish	Pork is forbidden; so is shell-fish. Fish must have fins and scales. Red meat and poultry must comply with kosher standards of slaughter. Milk and meat are usually kept separate. Vegetarian food is acceptable. Alcohol is usually acceptable.	Some Jewish men and women keep their heads covered at all times. Some Jewish men wear black clothes and have side-locks and beards. Some Jews have no strict dress code. Women and girls usually dress modestly.	For some Jewish men and women it is not usually acceptable to be touched by someone who is not a member of their close family. However, the need to save life always takes precedence within Judaism.	All laws normally applying to the Sabbath or festivals are overruled for the purpose of saving life or safeguarding health	It is usual for a companion to remain with a dying Jewish person until death. The dying person should not be touched or moved. He or she may wish to recite the Shema (The Lord our God is One...). Most Jews believe in an after-life.	The Chevra Kadisha (Jewish burial society) should be notified immediately after death. When a person dies the eyes should be closed and jaws tied. The body should be washed and wrapped in a plain white sheet and placed with the feet towards a doorway.
Muslim	English, Arabic, Bengali, Dari, Farsi, Gujarati, Kurdish, Punjabi, Pushto, Turkish, Urdu and many others.	Pork is forbidden. Alcohol is also forbidden. Meat must be halal. Kosher food is usually acceptable. Vegetarian meals and fresh fruit are acceptable.	Some Muslim women and girls wear a head covering. All are expected to dress modestly. Both males and females may choose to wear clothes that reflect their cultural background.	Treatment by medical staff of any religion is permissible but both men and women usually prefer to be treated by members of the same sex	Blood transfusions are acceptable. In the case of other interventions, such as organ transplants, the views of the family should be sought.	When a Muslim is dying, the face should be turned towards Mecca (south east in UK). A dying Muslim will need to say (in Arabic) or hear "There is no God but The God, and Muhammad is His prophet." You could say it in English for them. Muslims believe in an after-life, and believe illness and death should be faced in a spirit of acceptance of Allah's (God's) will.	Muslim bodies should be kept together in a designated area with men and women separated. Usually Muslim men handle a male body and women a female body. The body should be laid on a clean surface and covered in a plain cloth with the head on the right shoulder and facing Mecca. Next of kin usually make arrangements for burial which should take place as soon as possible.
Pagan	Mainly English	Most Pagans eat meat and drink alcohol. Many Pagans are vegetarian and some may be vegan	Ritual jewellery is common and has deep significance. Some wear a special ring, the removal of which would cause distress	No specific restraints	No particular requirements. Alternative treatments may be preferred.	Most Pagans believe in reincarnation.	The emphasis in funerals is on the joyfulness for the departed in their passing to new life
Rastafarian	English. The vocabulary may include Jamaican patois.	Pork, pork products and shellfish are banned. Most Rastafarians are vegetarian and avoid all stimulants such as alcohol, tea and coffee.	Many wear standard Western dress but some Rastamen wear crowns or Tams (hats) and some Rasta women wear wraps (headscarves)	No specific restraints	The cutting of the hair is prohibited in any circumstances	No particular rituals. The person will want to pray	When a Rastafarian passes (dies) a gathering takes place where there is drumming, singing, scriptures read and praises given
Sikh	English, Hindi, Punjabi, Swahili, Urdu.	Many Sikhs are vegetarian or vegan and do not eat eggs. Those who do eat meat will generally avoid beef. Salads, rice, dahl, vegetables and fruit are acceptable. The use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs is forbidden.	Initiated Sikhs wear five K symbols: Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (comb), Kara (steel bangle), Kirpan (short dagger) and Kachhera (shorts). Other Sikhs may wear some of these symbols. Most men wear turbans. Women usually cover their heads.	Treatment by medical staff of any religion is permissible but men and women prefer to be treated by members of the same sex.	Some Sikhs prefer Ayurvedic medicine. In general, cutting or removing any body hair should be avoided. If it is necessary to do so, don't throw it away. You should give the hair to another Sikh to dispose of. However, some Sikhs do cut their hair.	The dying person might want to have access to the Sikh scriptures. Sikhs believe in reincarnation.	The five Ks should be left on the body. Deliberate expressions of grief are discouraged. The dead person should be cremated
Zoroastrian (Parsee)	English, Farsi, Gujarati, Persian.	Some avoid pork and beef; some are vegetarian.	Most adult Zoroastrians will wear a sudreh (vest of fine muslin cloth) and kusti (cord around their waist) under western clothes.	No specific restraints	No special requirements	Zoroastrians prefer to die quietly and without being disturbed. They believe in an after-life.	Zoroastrians believe that corpses are polluting and dispose of them as soon as possible, traditionally in a Tower of Silence, but usually by cremation in the UK.

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