

The Embalming Process

The preparation of the body is called embalming. Although the body can be viewed without embalming, the best results are when the body is embalmed. Embalming is a chemical process that temporarily preserves the body and is the most successful way of removing the signs of disease and trauma. Embalming is done for several reasons; to allow families enough time to arrange the type of funeral services they want, to transport the deceased to another location for services and to restore the deceased to an appearance that is peaceful and soothing to the family. Individual state laws regulate embalming and with rare exceptions embalming is not required to be performed. The Federal Trade Commission requires that you must give your permission for embalming to be performed by the funeral home. Embalming is only performed by those who have had the required education and passed licensing requirements (in most states) to practice. The remains are always treated with respect and dignity.

The embalming process requires that the practitioner understand many different disciplines of knowledge. These disciplines include anatomy, microbiology, pathology, chemistry, and specialized areas such as restorative art and cosmetology. The procedure requires time and skill. What is described here is a description in a laypersons terminology and should not be confused with the more complex process that is practiced by the embalmer.

Embalming takes place in a room that resembles a surgical operating room. The procedure itself can vary according to the condition of the deceased but will follow a set of standard guidelines. It maybe more extensive if an autopsy has been performed or trauma is present. The procedure begins with the deceased being placed on a table, bathed and then cleaned with a disinfectant solution. The arterial system is used for the injection of preservative chemicals and the venous system is used for removal of some of the blood. The distribution of chemicals is done through a tube that is inserted into the artery and is connected to a machine that will send the fluid to the tube. Once sufficient fluid has been injected into the body, the vessels are tied off and the incision or incisions will be sutured closed. The internal body cavities are treated by inserting a long tube and removing any gas or liquids and adding a preservative chemical.

The body is thoroughly washed again, dressed and cosmetics are applied as needed. The use of cosmetics helps to even out the facial color changes that take place when the heart stops at death. It can also conceal bruises and trauma. Regardless of who will be viewing the deceased, the funeral home will ask the family to come to see them first. In many cases even if the family had thought they wanted the casket closed they will leave the casket open because of the work of the embalmer.