



FOOD AND FLUID AT END OF LIFE

At the end of life patients often experience a decline in appetite, loss of interest in eating and drinking, and weight loss. Some patients may lose their ability to swallow, which also decreases their eating and drinking. At some point in the illness, most patients will either be unable to take food and fluids by mouth or will refuse food, including their favorite food. These changes can distress families and other caregivers, and raise questions about artificial nutrition and hydration.

What is Nutrition and Hydration?

- Nutrition feeding a body with foods and fluids.
- Hydration is giving liquids for the body.

How You Can Help:

- Offer favorite foods and drinks, but respect patient's appetite and thirst levels.
- Offer fluids in small sips often, at least every two hours.
- If nausea is a problem, serve small portions of salty (not sweet), dry foods and clear liquids.
- Clean the mouth often – a clean tasting mouth may make food taste better.
- Make "mealtime" pleasant and soothing. Encourage the patient to rest before and after a meal
- Help other family members and friends understand why eating and drinking may cause the patient to be uncomfortable.
- Find other ways besides food and drink to show the patient you care. For example, offer the patient a massage or read to them or look at photographs with them.

It is normal for the patient to have less appetite and drink less as the disease continues. Treatment choices will depend on the patient's illness and wishes. Know that the patient's appetite will be smaller nearer to end-of-life. Forcing food and fluids when someone's body is no longer processing them can cause severe suffering and worsen their condition and death.

However, there can be symptoms that need to be treated, and families often need extra support dealing with these issues. Please talk to your Care Team about concerns and be assured that the Care Team will work with you to understand and manage nutrition and hydration issues according to the patient's and family's values and goals.



FOOD AND FLUID AT END OF LIFE

Tell Your Care Team:

If the patient:

- Is unable to eat or drink
- Has trouble swallowing
- Has dentures that don't fit
- Has a dry mouth or tongue
- Loses more than five pounds in a week
- Has less urine
- Becomes confused or drowsy

Need more information or help? Call 633-3400 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to get live help. Thank you for letting us help care for you and your loved ones.