



What you should know about
Food and drink near end-of-life

In most cultures, food is used as a way to comfort loved ones during sad times or illness. Providing food and drink for loved ones is reassuring and fills us with a sense of well-being. When a loved one no longer wants to eat or drink, we can become fearful that they will starve or be uncomfortable.

As patients near the end-of-life, it is natural for their interest in eating and drinking to decrease. When one begins the dying process, their body is preparing itself for death and no longer needs the nutrition received from food and fluid. They do not experience thirst or hunger in the same way as they did when they were healthy. Food and drink at the end of life cannot change or cure the disease.



Food and drink can lose its importance to patients nearing end-of-life.

Questions or concerns?

Call a hospice nurse at 513-891-7700. For caregiving tips visit www.HospiceofCincinnati.org/for-the-caregiver.

There is evidence that artificial nutrition and hydration, like tube feedings and intravenous fluids, can be more harmful than helpful for patients at end-of-life. As the body's organs begin to shut down, the body cannot handle the extra fluid which can build up leading to congestion in the lungs, nausea/vomiting or swelling in the arms and legs.

Also, attempting to get a patient near end-of-life to eat or drink when they no longer want to may cause them anxiety, as they may only do so to please you. Take cues from them. While you may continue to offer them food and drink, avoid reminders of how little they are eating. Understanding and accepting this concept can be difficult for family members and other loved ones of dying patients.

However, there are other ways you can show your love and support. One very important way is to provide frequent mouth care. Keeping their mouth moist will help to greatly increase their comfort. Other things you can do include:

- Reading
- Sharing stories and memories
- Playing music
- Sitting at the bedside holding their hand
- Creating a calm, quiet environment



Please talk with your hospice nurse if you have any questions or concerns.

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