

Food and Fluids

What happens if I can't eat or drink? What are my choices?

What Happens to Stop People from Eating or Drinking?

- Inability to swallow safely;
- Inability to drink or eat enough to keep up their strength; or
- Being unconscious for a long time.

Food and Fluids May Not Be Helpful:

- When someone is terminally ill and near death;
- At the end of a long life and near death; or
- When drinking or eating is not safe.

Ways to Provide Food and/or Fluids to Someone Who Cannot Eat or Drink:

- **Intravenous (IV) hydration/fluids:** This provides fluids to the body through a person's veins. A needle is put into a vein in the arm or wrist. A tube connects the needle to an IV bottle or bag which contains fluids. The IV can be used to give medications as well.
- **Feeding tube:** Tube feeding is a way to give complete liquid diet into the stomach or intestines through a tube. It can be used for a short or long period of time.
 - A **Nasogastric (NG) tube** is a feeding tube that goes through the nose, down the throat and into the stomach. This is used for a short period of time and does not require any surgery.
 - A **Gastrostomy Tube (G-tube)** is a feeding tube put directly into the stomach through the skin. This can be done surgically using a local anesthetic.
- **Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN) feeding** provides nutrition through the IV. This method is used when feeding through the stomach is not possible. Medications and additional fluids can be provided through the same IV site.

General Information

- Loss of appetite and thirst can happen with illness
- Frequent mouth care helps lips and mouth with dryness
- You can go home with a feeding tube
- There is a risk of infection with any of these ways of feeding

We hope this information has helped you understand your choices. If you have any questions, please ask your dietician, primary care provider or nurse. If you would like support regarding this challenging decision you may contact Social Work at Ext. 5376 or Spiritual Care at Ext. 5473.