

For more information,  
please contact your nurse or a member of  
your Care Team.

*Love &  
support is  
often the  
most  
important  
nourishment.*



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## Food and Fluids at the End of Life

*Information for Patients and  
Families*



**In this booklet you will  
learn about:**

- Changes in food and drink needs in dying patients
- Options to consider
- Helpful tips on mouth care

## ***Changes in food and drink***

As death approaches or becomes near, people often experience less interest in food and drink.

As death approaches people's needs and wishes can change. It's important to talk with your Care Team about the circumstances and see if artificial hydration such as intravenous fluids can be beneficial.

Artificial hydration is a way of taking in fluids other than through the mouth. Intravenous fluids are an option where the fluid goes right into a vein.

However, artificial hydration, in many cases, does not improve comfort or prolong life.

Your Care Team can work together with the patient and family to decide if hydration would be beneficial. There is no right answer to this question. This will always depend on the unique situation of each patient.

## ***Helpful things to consider***

Decreasing food and fluid intake is a natural part of the dying process.

Most dying people do not experience hunger or thirst.

Providing food or fluids by artificial means may, in fact, increase symptoms such as shortness of breath, mucous/fluid buildup in the throat or lungs, restlessness, nausea and vomiting.

Difficulty swallowing, eating and drinking may increase risk of choking.

Artificial hydration does not provide nutrition.

Artificial hydration does not usually prevent or relieve a dry mouth or thirst.

Frequent mouth care can relieve a dry mouth. Please see care provider for tips on mouth care.

## ***General tips for mouth care***

Use a moist soft cloth to keep lips moist.

Use a soft toothbrush or plain mouth swab to wipe the mouth.

Avoid glycerine, lemon swabs or mouthwashes containing alcohol which can dry the mouth further.

When the person is still able to swallow safely let him or her decide on the amount of fluid and food wanted.

Offer ice chips or popsicles

When the person is no longer able to swallow consider other kinds of comfort such as gentle massage, skin care, music and conversation.

Reference:  
Victoria Hospice (June 2011). Foods and fluids at end of life available at [www.victoriahospice.org](http://www.victoriahospice.org)