

THE TRUTH ABOUT

LONG-TERM MEDICALLY ADMINISTERED NUTRITION & HYDRATION

What is medically administered nutrition and hydration?

Medically administered nutrition and hydration supplies the body with food and fluids when a person cannot safely take in food and drink by mouth.

- When a hospitalized patient can't eat or drink for a few days, hydration and appropriate nutrition are provided, usually through an intravenous (IV) line.
- When a patient can't safely swallow or won't eat or drink as a result of long-term illness or brain damage, it must be determined if providing medically administered nutrition is in their best interest.

How is it given?

- When people are sick and can't eat, fluids can be provided during the first few days through an IV (tube inserted into a vein) or an NG tube (tube inserted through the nose and into the stomach).
- If a person still cannot safely swallow after several days, a long-term solution may be needed. A tube can be surgically inserted into the stomach (sometimes called a PEG tube).
- "Tube feeding" is when liquid nourishment is given to a patient through a tube.

When would long-term tube feeding be considered?

- **Strokes** – A stroke can damage the part of the brain that controls the ability to swallow. If a stroke patient still has the ability to make decisions and has a good quality of life, they may want to try long-term tube feeding.
- **Late-stage dementia** – Patients in late-stage dementia may not benefit from tube feeding. Major medical societies do not recommend long-term tube feeding for patients with late-stage dementia.
- **End-stage illness** – During the late stage of illness, the body may not tolerate nutrition because of the illness and dying process. Patients may lose weight even when they eat, or simply lose their desire to eat. This is a sign that the work of processing food may be too much for the body to handle.

Medically administered nutrition and hydration can add more discomfort to a dying person's physical symptoms such as: bloating, swelling, cramps, diarrhea and shortness of breath.



Will my loved one suffer if we don't provide nutrition and hydration?

- Most patients who are at the end of life do not typically feel hungry or thirsty.
- Tube feeding is different from ordinary eating and drinking and does not offer the comforts that come from the taste and texture of food and liquids.
- Keep in mind, there are comfort measures that can be used to treat dry lips and/or a dry mouth.

Can medically administered nutrition and hydration be legally withheld or withdrawn?

Yes. The Supreme Court has ruled that medically administered nutrition and hydration is different than normal eating and drinking, and may be withdrawn or withheld if it doesn't meet the patient's goals.

