

## Can they have nutrition through a tube?

**Nutrition from an IV** is not a long-term solution when a person with delirium cannot eat.

Sometimes the doctor orders IV fluid with some sugar in it, but this only provides a little bit of nutrition.

Specialized IV nutrition has many risks. We use it only when someone's digestive system is not working.

**Feeding tubes in the nose or stomach** are not usually recommended for someone with delirium. When a person is confused, having a tube put in can be unpleasant and hard to do. The tube can be uncomfortable and the person might pull it out.

If tube feeding is being considered, the dietitian or doctor will talk with you about how it can help and any risks.

To learn more about delirium in older adults, in English or Punjabi, go to:

[Delirium in the Older Adult: A Family Guide](#)

or go to:

[patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca](http://patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca)  
and search 'delirium'.



## Delirium and Nutrition

### Frequently Asked Questions



## What is delirium?

Delirium is a condition where a person's thinking and behaviour change from what is normal for them. They become confused and have a hard time focusing.

Delirium is usually temporary, but its effects can last from a few days to weeks.

## How can delirium change how a person is able to eat?

Delirium can make it hard for the person to do any of the following:

- swallow food
- focus on eating
- stay awake to eat

These can all affect their ability to swallow food without choking and to eat enough.

Watch for signs of difficulty swallowing such as coughing, choking, gagging, or clearing the throat. Tell the staff if you notice these signs.

## Will they eat enough food to get better?

When a person has delirium, they feel hunger less often. As they recover from delirium, their ability to feel hunger should return and they will likely eat more.

## How can I help them get enough food?

Here are ways that you can help:

- ✓ Make sure they are fully awake and focused on eating.
- ✓ Have them sitting upright.
- ✓ Turn the lights on so they can see the food.
- ✓ Offer a small mouthful of food at a time.
- ✓ Take breaks between bites of food.
- ✓ Make sure they have good oral care before meals and snacks.

When choosing what food to offer, do the following:

- ✓ Follow the diet recommended by the health care team.
- ✓ Ask what foods you can bring from home.
- ✓ Offer smaller meals more often instead of 3 large meals a day.

## How do I know what they can eat?

The health care team helps guide decisions around feeding. You can ask the team questions about feeding.

Here is what each member of the health care team does:

### Speech-language pathologist (SLP)

- does a test to see if the person can swallow and eat food safely
- suggests the texture of food and fluid the person can safely eat

### Dietitian

- helps choose foods that the person enjoys and can safely eat
- suggests foods and supplements to improve nutrition, when needed
- explains options for feeding, including tube-feeding

### Doctor

- talks with you about goals of care
- explains the option of enjoying certain food and drinks, even when tests show they are not safe because of problems swallowing
- explains when tube feeding might be an option