

## What about tube feeding?

Many families wonder about different routes of giving food and fluids, such as tube feeding. This allows nutrition to be given through a tube into the stomach. Studies show that tube feeding may not make people more comfortable, live longer, nor improve their quality of life.

Some people find it harder because of how and when the tube feed is given. Bloating, reflux, diarrhea, aspiration, nausea, or infection can happen. There could be reasons why tube feeds are used with certain people.

Families should talk openly about tube feeding while their loved one can talk about their wishes. It is important to honour your loved one's wishes.

For more information, please speak with your care team.

## What can I do when my loved one won't eat or drink?

You can do a lot to show that you love and care, such as:

- Just be there. You don't have to talk.
- Spend time together that isn't focused on food.
- Use gentle touch to give pleasure and comfort.
- Go out for a walk or activity if your loved one is able.
- Enjoy quiet activities such as listen to music, read out loud, or look at pictures.
- Keep their mouth moist. Do mouth care often to provide comfort. Talk to your care team about how you can help.
- Remember rejecting food doesn't mean the person is rejecting you or giving up.

## Eating for Comfort as Health Declines

Adapted with permission from Alberta Health Services, 2016

[www.fraserhealth.ca](http://www.fraserhealth.ca)

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

Catalogue #265395 (April 2017)  
To order: [patienteduc@fraserhealth.ca](mailto:patienteduc@fraserhealth.ca)



The changes people go through as their health declines can be hard to talk about. This pamphlet is meant to help start important conversations between families and the health care team about eating and drinking.

### **Why is this hard to talk about?**

Eating can bring up emotions. Giving food and drink is a way of showing you care. When your loved one is eating less or can't eat, it can be very hard to accept.

### **Why isn't my loved one eating?**

As people get older, or as their health changes, it is normal to eat or drink less. Eating can become hard work. The body becomes less able to use the energy and nutrients from food and drinks.

Eating might cause discomfort such as nausea or bloating. As people near the end of their life, they usually feel less hungry and thirsty, and can lose weight no matter how much they eat.

Families often wonder if having softer food textures or supplements will help. Texture changes or supplements might help. Dietitians and other health care providers can guide you.

### **How do I know my loved one doesn't want to eat or drink?**

Listen and watch what your loved one is telling you about eating and drinking. Respect what they tell you, with words or actions, or what they have said or written before. Body language and facial expression can be as powerful as words.

Here are some signs that your loved one doesn't want to eat or drink:

- Say things like, "No. I just can't. I'm too tired. You have it."
- Make sounds or repeat a sound with urgency or change in tone as food or drink is offered.
- Turn their head away from the spoon, close lips, push food away, frown, or clench their hands.
- Close their eyes or fall asleep.

Depression, medicine, problems with swallowing, constipation, and a dry mouth can affect the appetite. Talk with your care team about options to deal with these concerns.

### **How to "eat for comfort"?**

- Take attention away from food and drink. Know that food and drink might not make your loved one better.
- Offer food and drink without force or pressure to eat.
- Get pleasure from food and drink without worrying about what, how much, or how healthy the food might be.
- Be flexible. What your loved one wants and how much they eat could change from day to day. If they show signs of discomfort, wait for another time to offer food or drink.
- Look for other ways to spend time together.

***Caring is the best  
nourishment!***