

# **End of Life Nutrition and Hydration**

## **End of Life Symptoms that Affect Nutritional Care**

When a person nears the end of life, symptoms of health problems can affect their comfort. This guide provides suggestions for caregivers to help control or manage symptoms.

### **Anorexia/Loss of Appetite**

- Offer favorite foods (or whatever sounds good to the individual at the time)
- Offer nutrient dense foods/supplements
- Try 6 small meals/snacks a day, or offer food every few hours

### **Taste/Smell Alterations**

- Offer anything that the individual thinks they may like
- Try more flavorful foods if they are tolerated
- Avoid strong odors that are offensive to the individual

### **Dry Mouth**

- Provide good oral care (frequent swabbing of the mouth and tongue)
- Offer sips of fluids frequently
- Offer ice chips
- Sorbets, lemon ice, sherbet, or lemon drops with or in between meals may be helpful

### **Sore Mouth**

- Provide good oral care (frequent swabbing of mouth and tongue)
- Avoid acidic and spicy foods
- Encourage fluids to maintain hydration
- Offer soft, chopped or ground foods if needed

### **Cramps, Heartburn, Bloating, and Gas**

- Encourage the person to eat slowly and chew food well
- Support a relaxed atmosphere at meal time
- Encourage small, frequent feedings
- Try liquids between meals rather than with meals
- Avoid high fat foods
- Avoid spicy foods
- Avoid chewing gum
- Avoid gas-forming foods such as apples, asparagus, dried beans, bran, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carbonated beverages, and cauliflower

# **End of Life Nutrition and Hydration**

## **End of Life Symptoms that Affect Nutritional Care (page 2)**

### **Nausea**

- Offer whatever foods/fluids the individual can tolerate
- Offer small meals and snacks
- Encourage the person to eat slowly and chew food thoroughly
- Try “dry meals” with liquids given between meals (one hour before or after); offer cool, clear liquids
- Don’t force the person to eat
- Encourage the person to avoid favorite foods during bouts of nausea to avoid developing aversions to those foods
- Avoid any specific food intolerances or dislikes
- Avoid fatty and fried foods, heavy sweets, spicy foods and foods with very strong odors
- Avoid unpleasant odors
- Encourage carbonated beverages such as lemon-lime soda or ginger ale

### **Vomiting**

- Avoid eating until vomiting passes
- Drink clear liquids after vomiting episodes if tolerated
- These foods may be more tolerable for individuals with nausea and vomiting:
  - Crackers, pretzels, toast, angel food cake, cream of wheat or rice cereal
  - Soft, bland fruits or vegetables such as peaches or green beans
  - Broth or cream soups
  - Ginger ale or lemon-lime soft drinks
  - Sherbet, pudding, ice cream, popsicles, gelatin
  - Juices (other than citrus or sour juices), fruit drinks
  - Dairy products
  - Meat salad sandwiches
  - Desserts with fruits

### **Constipation**

- Offer high fiber foods. Increase fiber intake as tolerated
  - Whole grain breads and cereals, bran cereals
  - Offer more fruits and vegetables, lentils, split peas, navy, pinto or kidney beans in casseroles or soups
- Offer and encourage plenty of fluids daily
- Encourage physical activity
- Try prunes or prune juice for their laxative effect
- Hot beverages may act as bowel stimulants

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## **End of Life Symptoms that Affect Nutritional Care (page 3)**

### **Diarrhea**

- Consider food intolerances, such as lactose intolerance, as a cause, and eliminate offending foods to see if diarrhea resolves
- Encourage small, frequent meals
- If severe, drink only clear liquids and advance to a regular diet as tolerated
- Avoid carbonated beverages, liquids with meals, high fiber foods, fatty or fried foods
- Avoid raw fruits and vegetables
- Avoid spicy foods
- Encourage fluid between meals
- Encourage bed rest
- Offer salty foods or salt to replace lost sodium
- Offer foods high in potassium; bananas, potatoes, apricot nectar

The following foods may be better tolerated for those experiencing diarrhea:

- Starches: rice, noodles, cream of wheat or farina, white bread
- Fruits and vegetables: pureed cooked vegetables, applesauce, grape or apple juice, ripe bananas, canned or cooked fruit without skin
- Protein foods: yogurt, eggs (completely cooked and not fried), smooth peanut butter, chicken, turkey, tender lean beef, low-fat beef, cottage cheese