



Changing Needs for Food and Fluid  
at End-of-Life  
Options to Consider  
Helpful Tips on Mouth Care



For more information  
please contact your  
Nurse Consultant  
or a member of your  
healthcare team



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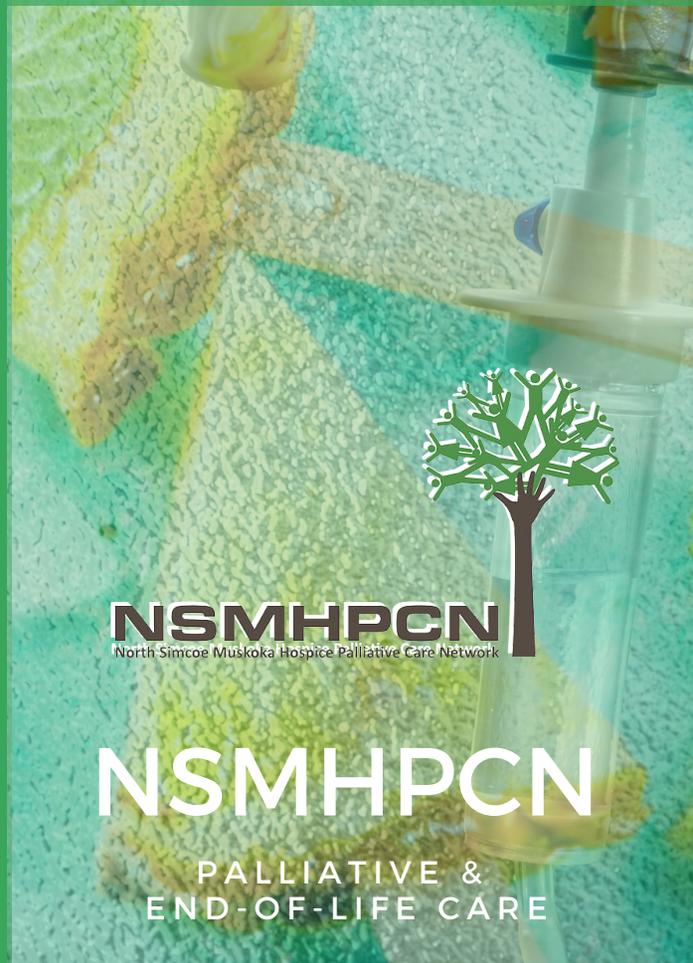


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# End-of-Life Nutrition

Information for Patients and Families



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# NSMHPCN

PALLIATIVE &  
END-OF-LIFE CARE

## CHANGES IN FOOD AND DRINK

Towards end-of-life people often experience decreased appetite/intake of both food and fluid, weight loss and inability to swallow. This may be interpreted as a sign of failure or as “giving up” by the person/family. Decreasing food and fluid intake is a natural part of the dying process.

Comfort means safely providing the person with what they want, when they want it. i.e. if the person asks for a drink, raise the head of the bed and give them a small amount of fluid. If you hear the person cough or have difficulty breathing while giving them fluids, stop immediately.

Encouraging food and fluids during the dying phase does not usually improve function or change the outcome.

If unable to eat solids, nutritional supplements may be helpful. Please ask your healthcare provider for suggestions i.e. boost or ensure.

It is important for the goals of care conversation to include the patient, family members and the healthcare team to ensure the patients wishes are known.

*“We cannot change the outcome,  
but we can affect the journey.”*

— Leann Richardson

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

If your loved one is very sleepy or has trouble swallowing and you try to feed them, the food or fluid may go down into the lungs, which can cause them to choke, cough, or have trouble breathing.

When a decrease in intake is noticed, some families ask for fluid replacement through a needle in a vein or subcutaneous tissue (hypodermoclysis). The solutions used are usually sugar and water and/or salt and water and do not provide your loved one with nutrition. There may be a short period of time that artificial hydration is appropriate for symptom management, please discuss with the healthcare team

Artificial hydration does not necessarily provide comfort and may actually have the opposite effect creating increased burden on organs that are shutting down. When fluid builds up in the body it can cause shortness of breath, swelling and increased secretions.

It is important to incorporate personal rituals and beliefs.

### OTHER TIPS TO CONSIDER

- Set small goals
- Sit upright
- Add sugar to foods that taste excessively salty
- Add salt to foods that taste excessively sweet
- Use plastic utensils for those who report a metallic taste

## MOUTH CARE TIPS

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

As the person declines the need for mouth care increases. Recommended mouth care options:

- frequent (hourly) mouth care is very important for patient comfort
- try ice chips, popsicles or tart liquids to stimulate salivation
- pineapple contains an enzyme which cleanses the mouth
- cool mist humidifier at night
- soda water may help loosen thick secretions
- artificial saliva spray can promote comfort
- do not use petroleum based products if oxygen is used; use a water based lubricant
- apply a damp cloth to keep the lips moist
- use a soft toothbrush or plain mouth swab to wipe the mouth
- seek treatment of fixable problems i.e. mouth sores or thrush

Remember to consider other types of care that may be comforting including gentle massage, skin care, music, conversation and spiritual support.

*“How people die remains in the  
memory of those who live on.”*

— Cicely Saunders