



# LIVING WITH SERIOUS ILLNESS NUTRITION & HYDRATION

For all of us, the word “food” is infused with deep emotional and social meaning. It is life. It powers our most creative energies. And we instinctively “know” to offer it when we see that a loved one is hungry or thirsty.

But what if you or a loved one are living with serious illness? Some questions that you may have are:

- How do my nutritional needs change as my illness progresses?
- How do I know what to eat and how much?
- When is it OK to consider withholding nutritional support?
- Who can help me make the best decision?

## **SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:**

**Engage those involved in your care: have a conversation with the medical team to understand food and drink needs during stages of illness.**

- You, your loved one, and the medical team can set goals of care that encompass the best options for food and drink
- it’s important to communicate these goals of care to all individuals providing care

**Get educated: it is normal for eating behaviors to change during serious illness and near the end of life.**

- decreasing appetite and thirst is a natural process of the body slowing down
- people naturally limit their intake of food and fluids as less energy is needed
- there is no evidence that increased intake of foods or fluids prolongs life or relieves suffering in individuals with terminal illness

**Understand the differences between medically provided nutrition and hydration versus food and drink.**

- the use of a gastric tube or intravenous (IV) fluids can lead to side effects and discomfort
- these types of medical interventions can impact the ability to connect socially with family and friends
- medical interventions for nutrition and hydration at the end of life do not reverse or cure disease

For more information, contact your primary care physician or reach out to the specialists at Hunterdon Palliative Care: [908-237-7018](tel:908-237-7018) or Hunterdon Hospice: [908-788-6600](tel:908-788-6600).



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