



Eating and drinking at end of life

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Quite often, as a person approaches the end of their life, their swallowing deteriorates, and they may not be able to manage food and drinks as they normally would. They may take a longer amount of time to eat or drink, or you may find that they are coughing when swallowing. This can be a result of:

- ❖ Drowsiness; you may find that the person is not as alert and is more fatigued
- ❖ Weakness; as their body becomes weaker and more frail
- ❖ Lack of overall nutrition and hydration

Comfort feeding:-

- ❖ In cases where an individual is approaching the end of their life, we often recommend comfort feeding
- ❖ This involves offering the individual the **diet and fluids of their choice** and at their request in order to prioritise comfort and quality of life
- ❖ **Stop if oral intake is causing the person to become distressed**
- ❖ Modified diets e.g. soft and bite-sized, or puree, may be beneficial **if this is easier for the person to manage**
- ❖ It is often the case that the individual is only alert for very short amounts of time and therefore food and fluids can be offered during this time
- ❖ We understand there will be an **element of risk** due to the individual's deterioration, however it is important at this time to **prioritise the individual's comfort**.

General strategies which may help:

- ❖ Try to ensure the individual is **upright** when offering any oral intake, however this may not be appropriate as the patient deteriorates
- ❖ **Do not feed someone who is not alert/awake. Only offer intake when the person is awake/if they are requesting it**
- ❖ If the person is becoming distressed from oral intake, offering small amounts/teaspoons of fluids may be easier for the person to manage
- ❖ **Swilling and spitting** fluids of the individual's choice may also be an option if the individual becomes distressed by swallowing
- ❖ Mouth care sponges that have been dipped in flavours of the person's choice may be beneficial in the last stages of their life to provide "tastes for pleasure"

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