

What You Should Know About Tube Feeding

What is tube feeding?

Sometimes, when a person becomes very old or very ill, they may have difficulty swallowing. Tube feeding provides liquid nutritional supplements, water, and medicine to those who can no longer take in food or fluids by mouth.

What are the benefits?

Tube feeding can be very helpful to patients who are recovering from surgery or sudden illness, as well as healthy patients who require long-term nutritional support.

What are the risks?

Even in the best of situations, tube feeding has risks.

In order to receive tube feedings, your doctor must push a tube into your stomach through an opening in your abdomen.

Although the tube is anchored in place, patients who are very agitated may need to be sedated or have their hands tied down to keep them from pulling it out.

Because tube feeding is a mechanical process, the stomach is not able to tell the body when it is full. Fluid from a full stomach can overflow into the lungs and cause infection or swelling in the body.

Feeding tubes provide nutrition, but they do not provide the taste and social benefit of regular meals. Eating can be dangerous for tube feeding patients, so once a person has been put on one, they will probably not be able to eat regular meals.

What does this mean for me?

Many people wonder if refusing a feeding tube will cause them to “starve to death.” You should know that dying people do not feel hunger or thirst. If your illness is terminal, and a feeding tube will not help you get well, then starting one may do more harm than good. It can cause discomfort, and may prevent you from having a peaceful, natural death.

Tube feedings can be helpful to patients who need nutritional support while recovering from illness, but they do not provide the tastes and social pleasures of regular meals.

Do I have a choice?

Yes. You have the right to make your own health care choices. It is up to you to decide whether or not a feeding tube is right for you.

You should think about the times you will want a feeding tube, and

the times you will not. Whatever you decide, talk first with your family and your doctor.

This information sheet was designed to give you a general description of feeding tubes as a treatment choice near the end of life, some pros and cons of their use, and an outline of your options for choosing whether or not you want them to be a part of your Advance Care Plan.



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What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning is a thoughtful process used to plan for future healthcare choices. It involves personal reflection and discussions with loved ones and healthcare providers. Your plan should include both a Living Will and the designation of a Healthcare Surrogate who can make decisions on your behalf if you're unable to speak for yourself.

The best time to think and talk about future medical decisions is when you are *well*, rather than in a time of medical crisis.

Why should I have an Advance Care Plan?

Advances in medicine and technology have given us the ability to sustain life through artificial or mechanical interventions. In cases where patients are terminally ill with no hope of recovery, these interventions can prolong the dying process and prevent them from experiencing a peaceful, natural death.

By establishing an Advance Care Plan while you are well, you can make sure that your wishes are honored later, should you become unable to speak for yourself.

Does an Advance Care Plan encourage my death?

NO. You are not signing an agreement that says that you wish to die. You are making a choice for the future, about the kind of medical treatment you wish to receive when there is little or no hope for recovery.

Advance Care Planning Helps:

YOU make treatment decisions that can affect your life.

YOUR FAMILY have peace of mind knowing your decisions.

YOUR PHYSICIAN by providing information about the kind of care you want.

How can Project GRACE help me?

Project GRACE provides advance care planning services, free of charge, to anyone who wishes to communicate their future medical treatment decisions. The Project GRACE Advance Directive is used by many hospital systems across the country. It is acceptable to doctors and easily understood by the public. For more information, visit the Project GRACE website www.projectgrace.org or contact our office at 727-536-7364.

Project GRACE is an affiliate of the Suncoast Hospice and supported by grants, sponsorships and community donations through the Suncoast Hospice Foundation.

A gift to Project GRACE will help provide the people you care about the support and resources they need to make informed medical care decisions.

To make a donation, call 727.536.7364

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