

ALTERNATIVE NUTRITION AND HYDRATION

WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE NUTRITION AND HYDRATION?

If a patient is not able to swallow, there is a special treatment to help. It is called **alternative nutrition (food) and hydration (fluids)**. It may also be called artificial nutrition. This life support treatment gives nutrition and fluid to a patient who is not able to eat or drink.

This type of treatment needs to be given by a medically trained person. The health care team decides how much of each one needs to be given.

HOW IS ALTERNATIVE NUTRITION AND HYDRATION GIVEN?

Alternative nutrition and hydration is given in one of three ways:

1. Through a tube to the stomach or intestines (put in place by surgery)
2. Through a tube that goes through the nose to the stomach
3. Intravenously (into a vein) to the bloodstream (also called PPN or TPN)

WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

For some patients, alternative nutrition and hydration can be very helpful if they are recovering from surgery, trauma, illness or treatments that make it difficult to eat. These patients may be set up with alternative nutrition or hydration at home, but this should not keep them from doing their daily activities.

For other patients, especially those nearing end of life, the body becomes less able to use salt and water. In this case, alternative nutrition and hydration can be uncomfortable because it may cause bloating or water buildup in the lungs and legs. Also, it may not help the patient get better. Alternative nutrition and hydration does not have the taste and comfort of food and drinks. In fact, most patients at the end of life will not feel hungry or thirsty. They may have a dry mouth or lips, which can be moistened for their comfort.

YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM CAN HELP

You are the most important member of your health care team. Your doctor, nurse or social worker can help you talk about this treatment. They can answer your questions (how long will you need it, how will it help, what the side effects are, etc.). Your health care team will work with you to understand what this decision means for you.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM:

1. Will I feel pain or discomfort?
2. Will I feel hungry or thirsty?
3. What can I expect to feel without it?
4. How will my medical team support me?
5. How long will I need it?
6. Can I go home with it and still do my day-to-day activities?