



Tips for Careworkers: Nutrition and Hydration

What it is: Nutrition is about the intake of food and how this helps health of the body. Good nutrition helps people stay healthy. Nutrition depends on the quality of food and how often we eat.

Hydration is about the intake of fluids to help with growth and health.

Why it matters: In the early stages of palliative care, nutritional intervention can help people boost tissue repair and general wellbeing and prevent infection. However, as people come to the end of their life, they may have less interest in food, and they may have difficulties with swallowing or tiredness. This can be due to many reasons. Careworkers can help by reporting any difficulties and assisting the person to eat and drink if possible.

Eating and drinking are important parts of a person's life and social interactions. The attitudes and values of the person and their family are important in the decisions about eating and drinking.

What I need to know: Good food and drink can improve a person's quality of life by reducing the effects of weight loss, improving wound healing and tiredness. In the early stages of palliative care the person may need help with eating and drinking.

Towards the end of life, a person may be less interested in food and drink. Changes in their body's function and activity may mean less nutrition is needed. The goal is to enjoy food and reduce food-related discomfort. Family and carers may be distressed if a person does not eat. They can be reassured and provide comfort through mouth care or assisting with drinks. Mouth care remains important.

Do Ask the person what foods and drinks they like, or if they cannot answer ask their family and look at their dietary plan. Report or record this information.

Do Offer meals or snacks when the person is most alert and receptive.

Do Report to nursing/supervisory staff if you think that the:

- person
 - is in pain
 - has poor oral health
 - is confused
 - has difficulty swallowing
- carer
 - is stressed about weight loss.

Do Help the person to eat or drink if they:

- have trouble being able to eat or drink
- are confused
- do not recognise food.

Name:

My reflections:

Why are nutrition and hydration important?

What can I do to encourage someone to eat? What do I need to be careful of?

My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice
Tip Sheets:
Cachexia, Sarcopenia and Anorexia
Dysphagia
Oral Care

References used to develop this sheet are available at
www.palliaged.com.au