



## Artificial Nutrition & Hydration MU Patient Education Series

If a patient isn't able to swallow because of a medical problem, he or she can be given fluids and nutrition in ways other than by mouth. This is referred to as artificial hydration and nutrition. This is sometimes done when someone is recovering from a temporary problem, such as when fluids have been lost through vomiting, sweating, or diarrhea. It may also be done when someone has an advanced, life-threatening illness, is dying, or has a disorder that lacks nutrition.

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### WHY DO OUR BODIES NEED FLUID AND NUTRITION?

The human body is made mostly of water. Almost 60% of our body weight comes from water. In order to be healthy, the body needs water just as it needs food. You lose water every day. This is done 2 ways, by going to the bathroom and by sweating and breathing. You receive nutrients from the food we eat. This is what gives you energy. Every person's needs vary.

### WHY DO OUR BODIES NEED FLUID AND NUTRITION?

1. Fluid right into a vein. This is called intravenous (IV) fluid replacement.
2. Into the stomach or GI tract. A tube called a nasogastric tube (also called an NG tube).

It can only be left in for a short time, usually 1 to 4 weeks. If the tube has to be in for longer than 4 weeks, a different kind of feeding tube may be used. It's placed into the wall of the stomach (also called a PEG tube or g-tube).

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ARTIFICIAL HYDRATION AND NUTRITION?

A person who has a temporary illness and can't swallow needs nutrients and water to sustain life. Artificial hydration and nutrition can help prevent dehydration and help the patient recover from his or her illness.

For a patient who has an advanced life-threatening illness and who is dying, artificial hydration and nutrition may not provide many benefits. Artificial hydration and nutrition in these patients may make



the patient live a little longer, but not always.

### RISKS OF ARTIFICIAL HYDRATION AND NUTRITION:

IV hydration risks:

- Infection
- Blood clots in the vein
- Pain
- Swelling
- Inadequate nutrition
- Too many fluids

Risks with nutritional feeding tubes:

- Fluids in the lungs (aspiration)
- Coughing and pneumonia
- Uncomfortable feeling
- Plugging of tube
- Pain
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation
- Infections
- Dislodging

### WHAT HAPPENS IF ARTIFICIAL HYDRATION OR NUTRITION IS NOT GIVEN?

Persons who don't receive any food or fluids will eventually fall into a deep sleep (coma) and usually die in 1 to 3 weeks.

### HOW DO I DECIDE WHETHER TO USE ARTIFICIAL HYDRATION AND NUTRITION?

The patient and his or her family should talk with the doctor about the patient's medical condition and risks and benefits of giving artificial hydration and nutrition. Every situation is different. Your doctor can help you make the decision that is right for the patient and family.

#### **DISCLAIMER:**

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