

Discussions about nutrition are important.

As death approaches, people's needs and wishes can change, making it necessary to keep asking, "What is helpful for this person at this time?"

There will be no single 'right answer' to this question, as it will always depend on the unique circumstances of each person.

Loving support is often the most important nourishment.

Support and Resources

Hospice Yukon

- Offers supportive services free of charge for individuals facing life threatening illnesses, as well as support for friends and family after the death of a loved one. Services include counselling, support groups and workshops on grieving.
- Phone: (867) 667-7429
- www.hospiceyukon.net
- located at 409 Jarvis Street, Whitehorse

Crisis Services Canada

- 24-hour, confidential and anonymous suicide prevention and support line.
- 1-833-456-4566
- www.crisisservicescanada.ca

Canadian Virtual Hospice

- Information and support on palliative and end-of-life care, loss and grief.
- www.mygrief.ca or www.kidsgrief.ca

Depending on your situation, you may be eligible for additional support services. In Yukon, your family doctor or health care provider may be able to direct you to services that meet your needs. Your employer and/or First Nation, as applicable, may have assistance programs to further support you during this difficult time.

Palliative Care Resource Team
(867) 393-8639
palliativecare@gov.yk.ca

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**Food and Fluids
at the End of Life**

**Information for
Patients and Families**

Yukon



As death approaches, people often experience a decrease in appetite with little or no interest in food and drink. They may be unable to digest food or to take fluids by mouth.

While a decrease in appetite and thirst is not painful and is an expected part of dying, it can sometimes be worrisome. People are often concerned about reduced calorie intake or the effects of dehydration. It is natural for families to want to continue providing nourishment at this time.

In specific situations, artificial hydration (such as intravenous fluids) can be beneficial. Generally, however, hydration does not improve comfort or prolong life.

In order to make the best decisions about hydration it is important that the patient, family and health care team work together. Your health care provider can offer information and advice about the role of food and fluids and ways to handle decreasing intake.

Helpful things to consider

- Decreasing food and fluid intake is a common, natural part of the dying process.
- Most dying people do not experience thirst or hunger as death approaches.
- Giving food and fluids by artificial means (e.g., intravenously) does not usually prolong life or improve its quality.
- Providing food and fluids by artificial means may, in fact, increase distressing symptoms such as shortness of breath, respiratory congestion, restlessness, nausea and vomiting.
- When people have difficulty swallowing, eating and drinking may put them at risk for choking.
- Artificial hydration does not provide nutrition.
- Artificial hydration does not usually prevent or improve thirst or relieve a dry mouth.
- Frequent mouth care can help relieve a dry mouth. (See general tips for mouth care, at right.)

Providing care and comfort

General tips for mouth care:

- Keep lips moist with petroleum jelly, water – soluble gels, artificial saliva or unscented moisturizer.
- Use a moist cloth, soft toothbrush or plain mouth swab to wipe the mouth; avoid glycerine and lemon swabs, which can dry the mouth further.
- Mist the mouth with water, being careful not to give too much.

When the person is still able to swallow safely:

- Give mouth care, as above.
- Let him or her decide on the amount of food and fluid wanted.
- Offer ice chips or popsicles.

When the person is no longer able to swallow:

- Continue mouth care, as above.
- Consider offering other kinds of support such as gentle massage, skin care, music and conversation.