

FEEDING

ADVANCE  
HEALTH CARE  
PLANNING  
FEEDING

4

PLANNING FACT SHEET FOUR

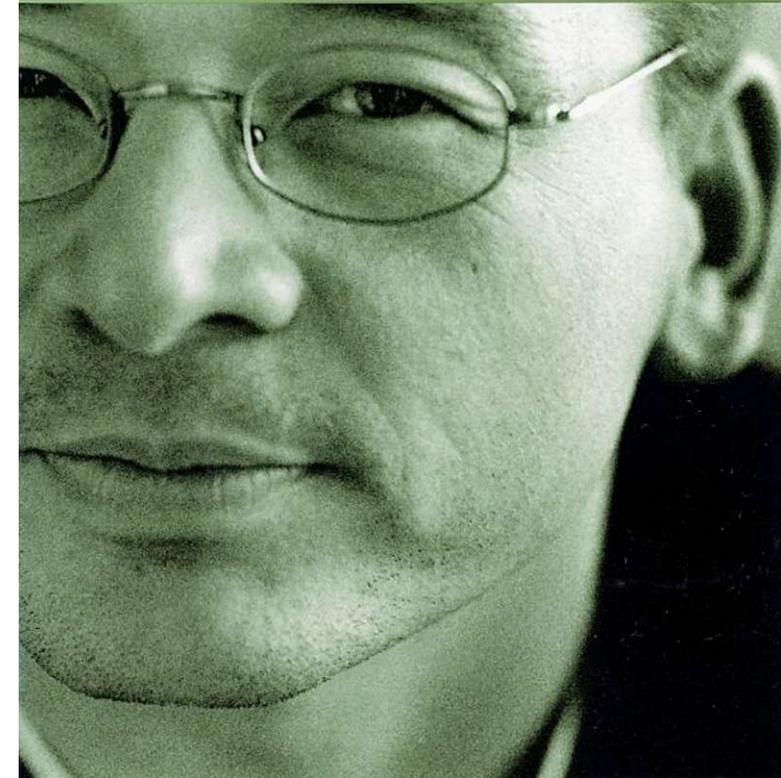
**WHY DO I NEED TO THINK  
ABOUT FEEDING?**

If you have a serious illness or you are dying, you may not be able to feed yourself. Someone must decide if and how you will be fed. If you are unconscious and can't swallow or communicate, you might be given fluids or food artificially to stay alive.

You need to think about and let others know your wishes about the kind of feeding you would want if you were not able to feed yourself. There are four ways to feed people who are not able to feed themselves: basic, supplemental, intravenous, and tube.

If you would like more information on Advance Care Planning, please contact:  
Island Health  
Tel: 250.370.5687  
E-mail: [advancecareplanning@viha.ca](mailto:advancecareplanning@viha.ca)  
or go to Island Health's  
Advance Care Planning web site:

[http://www.viha.ca/advance\\_care\\_planning](http://www.viha.ca/advance_care_planning)



Advance health care planning is a process of learning, deciding, and taking about what health care you want in the future if you are unable to make or communicate those decisions yourself.



Fact Sheet 1: OVERVIEW

Fact Sheet 2: CARDIO-PULMONARY RESUSCITATION

Fact Sheet 3: HOW MUCH HEALTH CARE DO YOU WANT?

>> Fact Sheet 4: FEEDING

## ADVANCE HEALTH CARE PLANNING FEEDING



### WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

#### WHAT IS BASIC FEEDING?

Basic feeding means being spoon-fed with a regular diet and helped to drink. If you could not swallow, you might require subcutaneous (under the skin) or intravenous (through the vein) fluids to prevent dehydration. The amount of fluid given to prevent dehydration is much smaller than the amount required for feeding through an intravenous line. If you have basic feeding, liquids can be given through an intravenous line but just for comfort, not for feeding.

#### WHAT IS SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING?

Supplemental feeding means extra nutrients are given in addition to a basic diet. For instance, you may be able to swallow solids, but not liquids, or vice versa. If you were not able to eat a regular diet, you could be given high-energy supplements or vitamins by mouth.

#### WHAT IS INTRAVENOUS FEEDING?

Intravenous feeding means that fluids and food is fed directly into the veins. This method only works for a limited time because the needles required for intravenous feeding eventually damage the veins. When the veins in the arms can no longer be used,

larger veins nearer the heart or in the chest and neck are used. Through these larger veins, it is possible to give more food and fluids directly into the circulation. This method of feeding is called total parenteral nutrition.

Intravenous feeding is used for people whose intestines are not absorbing food. If this occurs, there is no point giving special diets by mouth or into the stomach; only intravenous feeding can sustain life.

Intravenous feeding does not require major surgery. Intravenous lines can be inserted into the large veins near the heart using minor procedures under local anaesthetic.

#### WHAT IS TUBE FEEDING?

Tube feeding includes nasogastric and/or gastrostomy tubes. Nasogastric tubes are soft plastic tubes passed through the nose into the stomach. They are used for people who can digest food but can't swallow. Most people tolerate them well, but some people find them uncomfortable.

Gastrostomy tubes are passed through the skin directly into the stomach. This method of feeding is used for

people who can't swallow or can't tolerate a nasogastric tube. When a person needs feeding for a long time, this method is preferable to a nasogastric tube. Gastrostomy tubes can be surgically installed without a general anaesthetic. Once they are in place, they are fairly painless and trouble-free. People can even have baths and showers with them. They can be used to give people enough food and fluids to sustain them indefinitely.

#### EATING AND DRINKING AT THE END OF LIFE

Most dying patients feel little hunger; some stop eating completely and drink less and less. This may be a sign that the body is slowing down and preparing to stop its functions. If a dying person is thirsty, sips of water, ice chips, or lubricants for the mouth can make them comfortable.

#### HOW DO I DECIDE ABOUT FEEDING?

- Talk to your doctor or other health care providers.
- Think about your own values and beliefs and talk it over with your family and spiritual advisor.
- Consult the HealthLink BC website and read: "Should I have artificial hydration and nutrition?"

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/kb/content/decisionpoint/tu4431.html#av2401>