

# What you should know about TUBE FEEDING

## What is tube feeding?

Sometimes, when a person becomes very old or very ill, they may have difficulty swallowing. Tube feeding provides liquid nutritional supplements, water, and medications to those who can no longer take in food or fluids by mouth.

## What are the benefits?

Tube feedings can be very helpful to patients who are recovering from surgery or sudden illness, as well as otherwise healthy patients who require long-term nutritional support.

## What are the risks?

Even in the best of situations, tube feeding has risks. In order to receive tube feedings, your doctor must insert a tube into your stomach through an incision in your abdomen. Patients who are very agitated may need to be sedated or have their hands tied down to prevent them from pulling out their tube.

Because tube feeding is a mechanical process, the stomach is not able to tell the body when it is full. Fluid from a full stomach can overflow into the lungs and cause infection or swelling in the body.

Tube feeding may sustain life, but rarely improves its quality. Once a patient is placed on a tube feed, they are not likely

to ever resume eating or enjoy the social and sensual pleasures that regular meals provide. For a person with a progressive, terminal illness, tube feeding may prolong suffering and prevent them from experiencing a peaceful, natural death.

## What does this mean for me?

Many people wonder if refusing a feeding tube will cause them to “starve to death.” You should know that actively dying

people do not experience hunger or thirst. If you choose not to receive tube feeding, you will still receive the care you need, and if your mouth becomes dry, you will be given ice chips to keep you comfortable.

## Do I have a choice?

Yes. You have the right to control your own health care decisions. If you want to receive nutritional support from a feeding tube, you should think about specific instances when you will and will not want one used. Whatever you decide, talk first with your family and doctor.

***Tube feedings can be helpful to patients who need nutritional support while recovering from surgery or sudden illness, but they do not usually benefit patients who are very old or have progressive, terminal illnesses.***

This brochure was designed to give a general description of feeding tubes, some pros and cons of their use, and an outline of your options for choosing whether or not you want tube feeding to be a part of your Advance Care Plan.



## What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning is a thoughtful process used to plan for future healthcare choices. It involves personal reflection and discussions with loved ones and healthcare providers. Your plan should include both a Living Will and the designation of a Healthcare Surrogate who can make decisions on your behalf if you're unable to speak for yourself.

The best time to think and talk about future medical decisions is when you are *well*, rather than in a time of medical crisis.

## Why should I have an Advance Care Plan?

Advances in medicine and technology have given us the ability to sustain life through artificial or mechanical interventions. In cases where patients are terminally ill with no hope of recovery, these interventions can prolong the dying process and prevent them from experiencing a peaceful, natural death.

By establishing an Advance Care Plan while you are well, you can make sure that your wishes are honored later, should you become unable to speak for yourself.

## Does an Advance Care Plan encourage my death?

**NO.** You are not signing an agreement that says that you wish to die. You are making a choice for the future, about the kind of medical treatment you wish to receive when there is little or no hope for recovery.

### Advance Care Planning Helps:

**YOU** make treatment decisions that can affect your life.

**YOUR FAMILY** have peace of mind knowing your decisions.

**YOUR PHYSICIAN** by providing information about the kind of care you want.

## How can Empath Choices for Care help me?

Empath Choices for Care provides advance care planning services, free of charge, to anyone who wishes to communicate their future medical treatment decisions. Our living will is used by many hospital systems across the country. It is acceptable to doctors and easily understood by the public.

Empath Choices for Care is a program of Empath Health that was established through a partnership of physicians, elder care providers and community citizens. Our focus is providing holistic and compassionate advance care planning that respects human dignity, as well as each individual's best interests and personal wishes.



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