

More information about palliative care services in the western region can be obtained from the Regional Palliative Care Service Office, or from your local health care facility.

The Western Health Care Corporation Regional Palliative Care Service offices are located on the third level of Western Memorial Regional Hospital. Telephone (709) 637 5000 x 5414, or x 5203

Food for Thought



If Your Loved
One Isn't
Eating.

Are you facing the very difficult decision of whether to feed your dying loved one or not? Few situations will be more troubling. The information offered in this pamphlet is designed to help you in your decision-making.

When The Body is Dying all the organs begin to shut down and work less and less effectively. For instance, the heart, brain, liver and kidneys, among others, are less and less able to perform their functions. The digestive system also becomes disabled, often to the point where food just cannot be digested. Your loved one will lose his/her appetite and may be troubled with nausea and vomiting. This is the body's way of showing that food is no longer necessary.

This is a Normal Part of Dying Strange as it may sound, there are definite advantages of little or no food intake at this time. This is nature's way of leading to a peaceful death.



What Can You Do?

There are no easy answers but the following suggestions may help:

Avoid conflict by supporting your loved one's decision (no matter what it is).

Discuss your feelings with family/professionals.

To ensure good future memories use remaining time by: talking, holding hands, being there, looking at photo albums, giving back rubs, playing cards, reminiscing, etc.

This will provide quality time for you. Losing hope, while painful, allows you to start the grieving process. Your continued support and advocacy will ensure that abandonment of your loved one does not occur.

Let's look at why In most cases, pain is less. As fluid/intake is reduced, the tissues become dryer and shrink. This means that if there is a tumor present there is less pressure on a tumor. The tumor itself may become smaller. The need for pain medications is also dying.

Swelling of the feet, legs and other tissues will be reduced if fluid has accumulated in the abdomen, comfort will be promoted, as there will be less pressure on the organs. Breathing will also be easier.

Urine Output will go down, meaning that less energy will be used going to the washroom. If bladder control is a problem, it means less incontinence and a greater sense of dignity.

Lung Secretions will be less, resulting in less congestion and easier, more comfortable breathing.

Mouth Secretions will lessen. This will be especially beneficial if your loved one has swallowing difficulties. For example, he/she will drool less, and the need for uncomfortable suctioning will be reduced. The benefits will be an increase in comfort and dignity.

Nausea & Vomiting will be less and will greatly add to his/her comfort. Energy will also be conserved.

Ketone Formation happens when food intake is low. The importance of this is that it creates a feeling of euphoria or well-being. It works to reduce the anxiety one may feel in the face of coming death.

What About Hunger and Thirst?

Hunger is rarely experienced. However, thirst may occur initially. It is easily relieved by sipping water or sucking on ice chips or hard candy. The thirst usually disappears after the first few day. Careful attention to keeping the mouth moist and clean will enhance comfort.

In cancer the body's reaction to the tumor results in an altered use of food, so artificial feeding does not help very much, as the body cannot use the energy being provided. There are also potential complications with artificial feeding, and it is not recommended.

What Are Your Feelings?

It is normal to feel very emotional and overwhelmed by what is happening. There are valid reasons for this. In our society, we see food as a basic necessity of life. We equate it with LOVE. We view a good appetite as a sign of good health. Most of our social functions involve eating and drinking. It is not unusual to feel guilty and helpless because you are not providing a basic necessity, or to fear that you will be seen as uncaring.

You may feel conflict between yourself and your loved one if your efforts to encourage eating are not successful. If your loved one is in hospital, you may also feel conflict with the staff if there efforts are not successful. You may be losing your sense of hope as you see your loved one slipping away leaving you powerless to stop it.