



# Feeding Tubes

## Information for Patients and Families

Giving food and fluids to persons is an important part of caring for one another. In sickness, it is a normal part of care to always continue to give food and fluids by mouth as long as the person can take it in a safe manner. Sometimes food and fluids cannot be taken by mouth because the person has lost the ability to swallow. In these cases, it would be too risky to give food and fluids by mouth. Providing food and fluids in another way is possible by several types of feeding tubes. These, too, can have risks and must be evaluated on a case by case basis. In addition, if a person is in a disease state or is in a condition that is declining toward natural death, the question of tube feeding may not even have to be considered.

### When are feeding tubes generally useful?

Feeding tubes can be generally useful to provide nutrition and fluids to patients who:

- Cannot swallow, like during a stroke, head injury, spinal cord injury or severe burn.
- Have serious bowel problems like a blockage or inflammation.
- Have a neurological condition like Lou Gehrig's disease.
- Require short-term extra nutrition and fluids for healing purposes.
- Are in a state where they are not completely conscious.

### When are feeding tubes generally not useful?

Studies show that feeding tubes are generally not very useful in providing nutrition and fluids to patients who:

- Are likely to die soon in the last stages of cancer, heart failure, kidney failure or lung failure.
- Are physically restrained due to dementia like Alzheimer's Disease.

If at the end of my life I am not getting the nutrition and fluids I need, how do I or my family member decide if a feeding tube would be useful for me?

Your doctor and your spiritual advisor, if available, can help you and/or your family determine if a feeding tube would be useful for you after weighing the burdens against the benefits.

How can I use this information when I complete my Power of Attorney for Healthcare document (Advance Directive)?

- You can use this information to help you talk to your health care agent about your decisions related to feeding tubes.
- You can write down your decisions about feeding tubes in the document so your agent and doctors can refer to it in the future.