

# Artificial Nutrition and Hydration (ANH)



A program of Community Hospice & Palliative Care  
in collaboration with Northeast Florida hospitals

## What is Artificial Nutrition and Hydration?

Artificial nutrition and hydration is a medical treatment that provides nutrition (food) and hydration (fluids) when a person is unable to drink or eat enough on their own or have problems swallowing.

## How is Artificial Nutrition and Hydration done?

It can be provided through an IV directly into a vein or by putting a tube into the stomach, called a feeding tube. The type of tube depends on how long the artificial nutrition or hydration is needed:

- If only a few days: a nasogastric or NG tube is inserted through the nose to the stomach
- If more than a week: a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) tube is placed directly into the stomach through a small incision

## What are the benefits?

The benefits of artificial nutrition and hydration depend on the person's medical condition.

- Following an accident or in the case of a curable illness, short-term artificial nutrition and hydration can provide nutrients until the body heals
- It may help if a person has difficulty swallowing or reduced oral intake due to illness, injury or disability
- It is often useful when recovering from surgery
- It is useful for generally healthy people who require long-term nutritional support
- It may relieve pain with eating due to mouth or throat problems

## What are the risks?

Some of the risks of artificial nutrition and hydration that can affect comfort include:

- Infection
- Agitation leading to an attempt to pull needles and tubing out
- Swelling of the legs, arms and body
- Fluid in the lungs that can make it hard to breathe
- Diarrhea
- Inhaling contents of the stomach into the lungs

## Will artificial nutrition and hydration work for me?

Artificial nutrition and hydration (ANH) will not cure a serious or life-limiting illness. Our bodies begin to shut down because of illness, not because of the absence of nutrition. As our bodies are shutting down, we usually lose the ability and interest to eat or drink. ANH can increase suffering during the dying process. It is important to talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks of ANH when faced with a serious or life-limiting illness.

## Consider these Questions

Everyone has the right to make their own health care choices and inform others of their wishes in the event they cannot speak for themselves someday. These are questions to think and talk about as you decide about artificial nutrition and hydration:

- What makes life meaningful for me?
- Under what conditions/situations would I want artificial nutrition and hydration?
- Under what conditions/situations would I not want artificial nutrition and hydration started?
- Would I want artificial nutrition and/or hydration if my doctors think it would not improve my comfort level or might increase my discomfort?
- Would I want artificial nutrition and/or hydration if I had a terminal illness, an end stage medical condition or if I am unable to recognize my loved ones or know who I am?

*Remember to inform your doctors, family and loved ones about your wishes and decisions regarding artificial nutrition and hydration as part of your advance care planning.*

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