

Eating and drinking during last days of life

Eating and drinking for quality and comfort

During last days of life (where confirmed by a GP/Doctor), eating and drinking may often be for pleasure and comfort.

People who are awake and wish to eat and drink should be offered:

- Teaspoons or small sips of normal fluids.
- Any foods that they wish to eat.
- Often pureed food will be easier to manage due to its smoother texture (i.e., yogurts, custards, pureed favourite meals).

These suggestions are what may be most comfortable. People can be offered anything they wish for.

The focus on eating is for quality of life and comfort, therefore, people may choose to eat how much or how little as they wish.



Things to look out for

During last days of life, people may not wish to eat and drink.

They may often experience:

- Changes in smell and taste
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue
- Sore or dry mouth



Oral hygiene

- Oral hygiene is important when eating and drinking less.
- Mouthcare swabs and toothbrushes should be used to keep the mouth and lips clean and moist.
- Try using a non-foaming toothpaste when brushing teeth.
- Artificial saliva gels can also be used if the person's mouth is very dry.
- Monitor for signs of oral thrush.



Managing eating and drinking

When eating and drinking, it often helps to:

- Stay with the person and **offer assistance** with eating and drinking if needed i.e., hand over hand for drinks and cutting up foods.
- Ensure that the person is **awake and alert** and sat as **upright** as possible.
- Offer **small teaspoons** at a time and **allow time for the person to swallow**.
- Allow people to finish a mouthful before giving another.
- **Eating and drinking is for pleasure**, if the person does not wish to eat and drink, or shows signs of distress/coughing, stop and offer again later.



Contact details

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With thanks to NHS University Hospitals of Derby and Burton for permission to adapt their original document.

We support people to lead independent, healthy lives