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This pamphlet may be copied

***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.

Do You Know that 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 (to name a few) 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.

It may help if you can think of this as 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.

Let's look at why:

In most cases, pain is less. As fluid/food intake is reduced, so 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 medication is also less.

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 bathroom. 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 and 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.

You may be asking **Are There Disadvantages to Not Eating or Drinking?**

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 days.

Careful attention to keeping the mouth moist and clean will enhance comfort.

Artificial feeding can keep a person alive for a long time. However, studies show that complications may actually shorten the life span.

Considerations:

Is your loved one able to make his/her own decisions? If not, does anyone have Power of Attorney for personal care? Has he/she expressed any wishes about feeding at the end?

What Are Your Feelings:

You probably 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 or drinking. You are likely to feel guilty and helpless because you are not providing a basic necessity. You may be afraid that others will see you as uncaring.

You may not know what to do with your time if you are not offering food. You may feel conflict between yourself and your loved one if your efforts to encourage eating are not successful. You may also feel conflict with the staff if their 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. You may fear that your loved one will be abandoned.

Is There Anything You Can Do?

While there are not any easy answers, you may find the following helpful:

- ♥ 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 your 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 and will show others that you care. Losing hope, while painful, allows you to start the grieving work. Your continued support and advocacy will ensure that abandonment does not occur.