

Hydration (Fluids)

Advance Care Planning

There may be times during your cancer treatment when you are not able to swallow well or take in enough liquids to meet your body's needs. Artificial hydration may help you get the fluids you need. If this happens, your health care team will work with you to decide the best treatment plan for you.

The following information explains the different ways patients can receive fluids. Talk with your care team and learn about artificial hydration before you need it.

- Learn the facts.
- Understand the benefits and risks and how they apply to you.
- Talk with your health care team and ask questions.
- Talk with the people who you trust and care about you.

Types of Artificial Hydration

Artificial hydration is a way to give the body fluids through a tube. The fluids are absorbed into the blood stream. Artificial hydration can enter the body through a tube:

- Into the stomach or intestine
- Into a vein (intravenous or IV)
- Under the skin into fatty tissue

With any of these methods, you may receive fluids as needed or on a continuous basis (24 hours a day).

Stomach (NG Tube or G-Tube) or Intestinal Tube (J-Tube)

When a tube is needed only for a short time, it is usually placed through the nose into the stomach. This is called a nasogastric (NG) tube.

If the tube needs to be in place for a longer time, a tube may be placed through the skin into the stomach (G-tube) or small intestine (J-tube). This procedure may not require surgery.

IV Tube

When fluids are given by IV, the IV tube is connected to a bag of fluids which goes from the bag, through the tube, into a vein.

If you need fluids long-term, you will usually receive a central venous catheter (CVC). A CVC is a tube that is most often placed into a vein in the arm or under the collarbone. It will be removed when you no longer need it.

Tube Under the Skin Into the Fatty Tissue (Clysis)

You may receive fluids through a tube placed under the skin into the fatty tissue. This is called hypodermoclysis, or clysis, for short. The fluid is absorbed from the fatty tissue into the bloodstream.

Clysis does not give the body as much fluid as artificial hydration with an IV tube. This method works best for patients who need a modest amount of fluids. It is simpler, with fewer complications. Some hospice services provide clysis, but not all clinicians provide this treatment.

Benefits of Artificial Hydration

You may receive fluids through a tube to prevent or treat dehydration. If you are dehydrated, you may feel weak, dizzy or thirsty. These symptoms may also happen for other reasons. Depending on the cause, fluids may help the symptoms. If artificial hydration does not help, other treatments are available to help these symptoms.

Possible Complications

Some complications that may happen with artificial hydration are below. You will receive treatment for complications as needed.

Stomach (NG Tube or G-Tube) or Intestinal Tube (J-Tube)

Complications may include:

- Nose and throat soreness (for tubes placed through the nose)
- Skin soreness
- Infection
- Tube misplacement
- Tube falls out
- Tube gets clogged
- Tube leaks

IV Tube

Complications may include:

- Soreness at the IV site
- Infection at the IV site
- Infections of the bloodstream
- Blood clots at the IV site
- Too much fluid, which may cause swelling or breathing problems

Tube under the Skin into Fatty Tissue (Clysis)

Complications may include:

- Uncomfortable swelling at the tube site
- Infection at the tube site

Your Treatment Decisions

Talk with your doctor or nurse about any questions or concerns you have.

Artificial hydration may not be right for everyone. Sometimes the treatment has more risks than benefits. For some patients, the body cannot use the fluids properly. This often happens in the later stages of an illness, when the body begins to shut down. Comfort care may be the main goal of care at this time.

Caregivers often worry that their loved ones will be thirsty without water. Most people in this situation do not feel thirsty. If they are thirsty, very small amounts of fluids and good mouth care will keep the mouth clean and feeling refreshed. Talk with your doctor about any concerns you may have about your loved one's comfort.

Resources

Learn more about advance care planning online at:

www.MDAnderson.org/AdvanceCarePlanning.

Ask your social work counselor for a copy of the Patient Education workbook, **Advance Care Planning**.