

# What is Artificial Hydration?

Artificial hydration is a medical treatment that provides water and salt to someone who is too sick to drink enough on their own or who has problems swallowing.

Artificial hydration is given through:

- an IV in a vein or under the skin, or
- a tube placed through the nose into the stomach, or
- a tube is placed by surgery through the skin into the stomach or intestines.

---

## Does artificial hydration work?

This depends on how sick someone is and whether they are near the end of their life. Some people enjoy years of satisfying life while using artificial hydration.

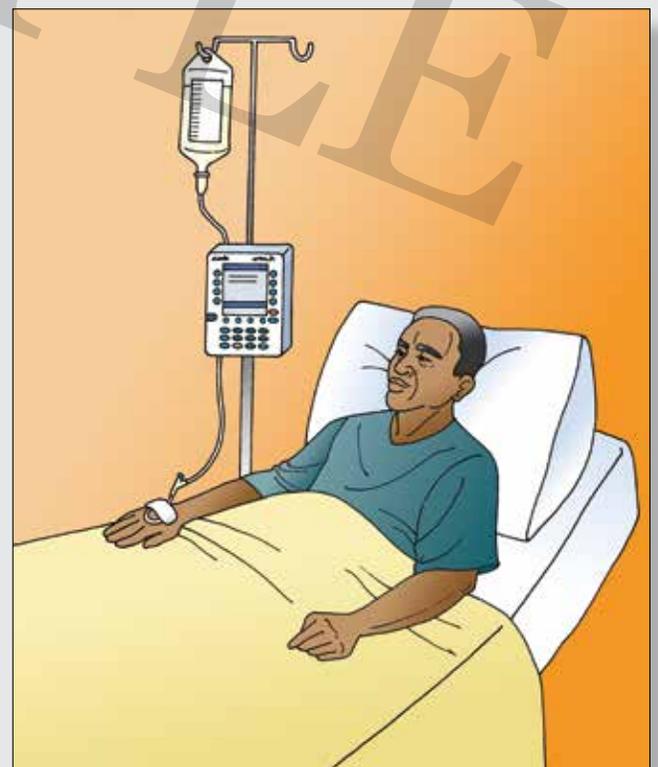
For people who are NOT near the end of their lives, artificial hydration may help.

For people near the end of life, and in late stages of dementia (memory loss), it is normal for people to stop drinking.

- At the end of life, the body becomes unable to use water and salt.
  - » Because of this, artificial hydration can cause:
    - water build up on the legs
    - water build up in the lungs

For people near the end of life, artificial hydration does not prevent dry mouth.

- People close to death often breathe through their mouth.
- Most people who are dying will have a dry mouth.



---

## Who is most likely to be helped by artificial hydration?

It depends on the type of medical problem a person has. Talk about this with your doctors.

The people most likely to be helped are those who:

- only need hydration for a little while.
- are NOT at the end of their life.

Some people who use artificial hydration lead active and happy lives.

---

## Who is less likely to be helped by artificial hydration?

People near the end of their lives are less likely to be helped.

- Near the end of life, it is normal for people to stop drinking.
  - The body often cannot use the water and salt.
  - Water can build up in the lungs and cause breathing problems.
- 

## What happens if I decide NOT to try artificial hydration near the end of life?

Talk to your doctor because it depends upon the reason you need artificial hydration.

People worry that a person would “die of thirst” if they did not get artificial hydration.

- If someone is near the end of their life, it is natural to stop drinking.
- Studies show that people who are near the end of life do not feel thirst.
- People who are dying from a disease such as cancer or dementia often stop drinking. These people do not die from thirst, but from their disease.



When someone is at the end of their life, NOT drinking may help the body feel less pain.

---

---

With less fluid, there is:

- less urine and less need for a tube in their bladder to catch the urine.
- less swelling of the legs and feet (edema).
- less fluid build up in the stomach, so less nausea and vomiting.
- less water build up in the lungs, so fewer breathing problems.

There may also be less noisy breathing that sometimes occurs when a person is dying.

You may decide not to have artificial hydration. If so, there are many other treatments to provide comfort.

- If the person can still swallow, hard candies or gum can help a dry mouth.
- Loved ones can provide:
  - » ice chips.
  - » swabs to the mouth with moist sponges to help dry mouth.

---

### How do I decide whether or not to try artificial hydration?

It is important to think about the risks and benefits to see if it is right for you.

Most people would want to try artificial hydration only if it could help them get back to a good quality of life. Your doctors can talk with you about:

- how long you might need artificial hydration.
- how long you might live with artificial hydration.
- what your life might be like using artificial hydration.

For some people, it is most important to try to live as long as possible.

- These people may be willing to try artificial hydration even if it causes other medical problems.

For some people, it is most important to die naturally.

- These people may not be willing to try artificial hydration.

### How do you feel?

---

---

## When a family member or friend is not able to make their own decisions, how do I decide if they should try artificial hydration?

Drinking water is part of everyday life.

It can be hard to separate our love for someone from whether or not artificial hydration would help them.

It is important to ask the doctors whether artificial hydration will cause more harm than good for your loved one. It is important to think about:

- what the person has said they would want.
- how sick the person is.
- if the person is near the end of their life.
- the person's religious beliefs.



It will help to have ongoing discussions with:

- the person you are making decisions for (if possible),
- other friends and family, and
- the healthcare team.

---

## How do I make my decisions about artificial hydration known?

- Tell your family, friends, and your doctor about your decision.
- Write your decision on forms you can get from your doctor.
- Give copies of these forms to your family and doctors.



1331 Garden Highway, Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95833  
(916) 489-2222  
[CoalitionCCC.org](http://CoalitionCCC.org)

This decision guide was made possible through a grant from the California HealthCare Foundation.

Copyright © 2014 Coalition for Compassionate Care of California. All Rights Reserved.

---