**What is tube feeding?**
Sometimes, when a person becomes very old or very ill, they may have difficulty swallowing. Tube feeding provides liquid nutritional supplements, water, and medications to those who can no longer take in food or fluids by mouth.

**What are the benefits?**
Tube feedings can be very helpful to patients who are recovering from surgery or sudden illness, as well as otherwise healthy patients who require long-term nutritional support.

**What are the risks?**
Even in the best of situations, tube feeding has risks. In order to receive tube feedings, your doctor must insert a tube into your stomach through an incision in your abdomen. Patients who are very agitated may need to be sedated or have their hands tied down to prevent them from pulling out their tube.

Because tube feeding is a mechanical process, the stomach is not able to tell the body when it is full. Fluid from a full stomach can overflow into the lungs and cause infection or swelling in the body.

**What does this mean for me?**
Many people wonder if refusing a feeding tube will cause them to “starve to death.” You should know that actively dying people do not experience hunger or thirst. If you choose not to receive tube feeding, you will still receive the care you need, and if your mouth becomes dry, you will be given ice chips to keep you comfortable.

**Do I have a choice?**
Yes. You have the right to control your own health care decisions. If you want to receive nutritional support from a feeding tube, you should think about specific instances when you will and will not want one used. Whatever you decide, talk first with your family and doctor.

Tube feeding may sustain life, but rarely improves its quality. Once a patient is placed on a tube feed, they are not likely to ever resume eating or enjoy the social and sensual pleasures that regular meals provide. For a person with a progressive, terminal illness, tube feeding may prolong suffering and prevent them from experiencing a peaceful, natural death.

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This brochure was designed to give a general description of feeding tubes, some pros and cons of their use, and an outline of your options for choosing whether or not you want tube feeding to be a part of your Advance Care Plan.

[EmpathChoicesforCare.org](http://EmpathChoicesforCare.org)