Nutrition and hydration

Key points to remember:
- Regular individual assessment of nutrition and hydration needs is essential.
- Food and drink are physical, social, cultural and spiritual needs.
- Desires for food and drink may suddenly decrease toward the end of life.
- Inability to eat and drink can be distressing for everyone involved.
- Preparing people for this loss of appetite can help them to understand the dying process.
- Providing nutritious meals and fluids can help to support a person in the last days of life.

Remember the seven Ps

Key messages

1. Establish the relevant clinical facts of the case
2. Assess the wishes of the patient and those important to them
3. Be aware of the processes needed to support the decision making
4. Consider the ethical perspective
5. Consider the legal perspective
6. Ethical questions

Ethical questions

- Difficult questions about nutrition and hydration can sometimes arise when providing end of life care. This framework may help you with decision making.
- Always:
  - Respect if a person is able to make their own decisions.
  - Respect if a person is not able to make their own decisions.
  - Respect a person's values.
  - Respect a person's wishes.
  - Respect a person's cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs.
  - Respect a person's autonomy.
  - Respect a person's privacy.
  - Respect a person's dignity.
  - Respect a person's rights.
  - Respect a person's preferences.
  - Respect a person's beliefs.
  - Respect a person's values.
  - Respect a person's wishes.
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  - Respect a person's wishes.
Who is this guide for?

All nursing staff including health care assistants in all settings caring for people at the end of life are important to them.

This guide has been developed using information from the 2014 RCN End of life care survey which showed that individuals wanted more education and information around caring for people at the end of life, in an independent review of evidence relating to nutrition and hydration at the end of life commissioned by the RCN, and expert opinion.

How will this guide help me?

This guide will highlight what is important when caring for a person approaching the end of their life. Where there is a focus on care in the last few days, the same caring principles can be applied throughout the last year of life.

It is designed to complement the RCN online resources on end of life care and nutrition and hydration. It is created as a tool to support learning.

You can find these resources at: www.rcnendoflife.org.uk

What are the fundamentals?

The NMC describe the fundamentals of care as:

“The fundamentals of care include, but are not limited to, nutrition, hydration, bladder and bowel care, physical handling and making sure that those receiving care are kept in clean and hygienic conditions… making sure you provide help to those who are not able to feed themselves or drink fluid unaided.”

What do I need to do?

7. Identify and meet the communication needs of each individual.
8. Communicate clearly and sensitively.
9. Listen to people.
10. Treat people compassionately.
11. Acknowledge pain and distress and take action.

What do I need to do?

The four UK countries have their own guidance on end of life care. The possibility that a person may be entering their last few days or hours of life must be recognised and those receiving care are kept in clean and hygienic conditions... making sure you provide help to those who are not able to feed themselves or drink fluid unaided.”

What do I need to do?

1. Recognise the possibility that a person may be entering their last few days or hours of life. It could also be used as a tool to support learning.
2. Communicate clearly and sensitively.
3. Listen to people.
4. Treat people compassionately.
5. Acknowledge pain and distress and take action.

National guidance for end of life care

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance is referred to as important to them. It is designed to complement the RCN online resources on end of life care and nutrition and hydration. It could also be used as a tool to support learning.

You can find these resources at: www.rcnendoflife.org.uk

The NMC describe the fundamentals of care as:...
All nursing staff including health and social care workers, volunteers and family members caring for people at the end of life are important to them.

The RCN, in collaboration with the commissioners, will ensure that end of life care is of the highest standard possible, and policies and procedures are clearly documented supported by robust evidence and best practice.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone caring for people at the end of life, including family members and volunteers, as well as health and social care workers from all settings, including those caring for people in the last few days or hours of life. It is designed to help all in health and social care to provide the best possible care at the end of life.

What are the fundamentals of care?

The NMC describe the fundamentals of care as:

- “The fundamentals of care include, but are not limited to, nutrition, hydration, bladder and bowel care, physical handling and making sure that those receiving care are kept in clean and hygienic conditions... making sure you provide help to those who are not able to feed themselves or drink fluid unaided.”

- “The five priorities of care:

  A. Recognise
  B. Communicate
  C. Identify
  D. Plan and do
  E. Support”

How will this guide help me?

This guide will highlight what is important when caring for people at the end of life. Whether there is a focus on care in the last few days, the same caring principles can be applied throughout the last year of life.

- It is designed to complement the RCN online resources on end of life care and nutrition and hydration. It is available as a tool to support learning.

You can find these resources at:
www.rcneolnutritionhydration.org.uk
www.rcnendoflife.org.uk

What do I need to do?

• Test people competency.
• Communicate clearly and sensitively.
• Identify and meet the communication needs of each individual.
• Recognise when someone may be entering their last few days or hours of life.
• Engage with relatives on the following topics relating to nutrition and hydration at the end of life as commissioned by the RCN, and expert opinion.

National guidance for end of life care

National guidance on end of life care is given in a manner that is responsive to individual needs. The four UK countries have their own guidance on end of life care. In England, the National End of Life Care Programme, which includes a National End of Life Care Programme for London, is delivered with compassion and humanity.

The four UK countries have their own guidance on end of life care. In England, the National End of Life Care Programme, which includes a National End of Life Care Programme for London, is delivered with compassion.

These themes are reflected in the other three UK countries:

- Northern Ireland: http://www.nidhni.org.uk
- Scotland: http://www.rcnsnap.org.uk
- Wales: http://www.rcnw-eole.org.uk

RCN Principles of Nursing Practice

RCN Principles of Nursing Practice

Leadership, contributing to an open and responsive culture.

Examples in end of life care

- Supporting a person with learning disabilities to die in their preferred place.
- Supporting a person with learning disabilities to go home to die and lives alone.
- Supporting a person with learning disabilities to die in their preferred place.
- Supporting a person with learning disabilities to go home to die and lives alone.
- Supporting a person with learning disabilities to die in their preferred place.
- Supporting a person with learning disabilities to go home to die and lives alone.
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Who is this guide for?

All nursing staff including health care assistants in all settings caring for people at the end of life of those who are important to them.

This guide has been developed using information from the 2014 RCN End of Life care survey which showed that individuals wanted more education and information around caring for people at the end of life, an independent review of evidence relating to nutrition and hydration at the end of life commissioned by the RCN, and expert opinion.

How will this guide help me?

This guide will highlight what is important when caring for people at the end of life. Where there is a focus on care in the last few days, the same caring principles can be applied throughout the last year of life.

It is designed to complement the RCN online resources on end of life care and nutrition and hydration. It is calculated as a tool to support learning.

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www.rcnendoflife.org.uk

www.rcnendoflifehydration.org.uk

What are the fundamentals?

The NMC describe the fundamentals of care as:

“The fundamentals of care include, but are not limited to, nutrition, hydration, bladder and bowel care, physical handling and making sure that those receiving care are kept in clean and hygienic conditions... making sure you provide help to those who are not able to feed themselves or drink fluid unaided.”

(NMC, 2013)

What do I need to do?

Test people comprehensively

Communicate clearly and sensitively

Respect the person’s communication needs in end of life care

Acknowledge pain and distress and take action

Communicate sensitive information to the relatives of the last few days and hours of life

Support relatives in decisions about their care

Identify and meet the communication needs of each individual

Communicate clearly and sensitively

Listen to people.

Treat people compassionately

Safety of patients, visitors and staff, management of risk, accountability, responsibility.

Leadership, contributing to an open and responsive culture.

Ethical integrity, legal integrity, technical skills, education, reporting, monitoring.

Patient-centred care, patient involvement.

Clinical reasoning.

Clinical safety.

Clinical practice.

Evidence-based, practice, quality improvement, continuing professional development, and research.

RCN Principles of Nursing Practice

The four UK countries have their own guidance on end of life care. The following principles reflect the four principles of care.

1. Recognise

The possibility that a person may have five days or less to live or may die within the next few days or hours. Sensitive communication of these situations to all staff involved, and to the relatives of the dying person is essential.

2. Communicate

Sensitively communicate all staff about the person’s preferences and wishes, and those identified as important by the family.

3. Involve

The family, the carer, and those important to them up to and until death if possible.

4. Support

The families, nursing activity around, involved and to the end of life care.

5. Plan and do

Advance care planning.

Advance care planning.

National guidance for end of life care

An individual plan of care, must be actively explored, documented and communicated clearly.

The four UK countries have their own guidance on end of life care. The following principles reflect the four principles of care.

1. Recognise

The possibility that a person may have five days or less to live or may die within the next few days or hours. Sensitive communication of these situations to all staff involved, and to the relatives of the dying person is essential.

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Sensitively communicate all staff about the person’s preferences and wishes, and those identified as important by the family.

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The families, nursing activity around, involved and to the end of life care.

5. Plan and do

Advance care planning.

Advance care planning.

Examples in end of life care

- Responding to a complaint about poor end of life care.
- Co-ordination of care in the community setting with a person who is in hospital and wants to go home to die and lives alone.
- Supporting a person with learning disabilities to die in their preferred place.
- Supporting a person who is in hospital and wants to die in a rural setting.
- Tele-health care in a rural setting.
- The possible introduction of tele-health care in a rural setting.
- The four UK countries have their own guidance on end of life care. The following principles reflect the four principles of care.

6. Plan and do

Advance care planning.

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Examples in end of life care

- Responding to a complaint about poor end of life care.
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- The possible introduction of tele-health care in a rural setting.
- The four UK countries have their own guidance on end of life care. The following principles reflect the four principles of care.

6. Plan and do

Advance care planning.

Advance care planning.
Key points to remember:
• regular individual assessment of nutrition and hydration needs to be carried out.
• food and drinks physical, social, cultural and spiritual needs to be addressed.
• desire for food and drink may naturally decrease towards the end of life.
• malnourishment and dehydration can also occur in people with learning disabilities.
• the needs of the person cannot be determined for everyone involved.
• preparation needs to be undertaken by nursing staff.
• support a person to eat and drink for as long as they wish or are able to do so.
• sensitive communication may be required about why a drip may or may not be needed in the last few days of life.

Nutrition and hydration

Key questions to consider:
• When the desire to eat and drink is reduced, is there a medical reason for this?

Remember the seven Ps

Ethical questions

Difficult questions about nutrition and hydration can sometimes arise when providing end of life care. This framework may help you with decision making. Always ask yourself these questions:

- Is there a legal reason for the patient not to eat and drink?
- Is there any benefit for the patient in continuing to eat and drink?
- Does the patient or a person close to the patient feel they should continue to eat and drink?
- Is it in the patient’s best interests to be force-fed or have fluids given?
- Is there any one who is better placed to make the decision on behalf of the patient?
- Is it the wish of the patient to eat and drink?
- Can someone else make the decision for the patient?

Cultural and spiritual needs

Each person will have cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs that will shape the care you give. Be mindful that:

- for some people spirituality may be linked to a belief system and for others it may be about finding meaning in what is happening.
- having a conversation and listening to people will help you understand and meet their needs.
- you don’t need to share a person’s values to respect them.
- a person may have rituals that they may need you to support them with before or after death.
- you won’t know what is important to people unless you ask them.
- it is not possible to provide all the answers and a person may need further support by referral to a specialist team.

Key messages

- Dying is a natural process.
- One size fits all decision making is morally wrong.
- Respond to each person compassionately even if they are not your direct responsibility.
- Check that each person’s understanding reflects what they have been told.
- Establish a person’s wishes and avoid assuming a lack of capacity without careful assessment.
- Nutrition/hydration are regarded in law as a medical treatment.
- Artificial or clinically assisted nutrition and hydration may need to be discussed.
- The NMC Code of practice states that ‘you as a nurse or midwife should be aware of the need to...

References


Further resources

Further resources relating to end of life care and nutrition and hydration can be found online: www.rcnendoflife.org.uk/resources www.rcneolnutritionhydration.org.uk/resources

RCN online resources

Further information on end of life care and nutrition and hydration is available online:
www.rcnendoflife.org
www.rcneolnutritionhydration.org.uk

www.rcn.org.uk

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www.rcnendoflife.org.uk
www.rcneolnutritionhydration.org.uk
Key points to remember:
- Regular individual assessment of nutrition and hydration needs to be made.
- Food and drink may have physical, social, cultural and spiritual meaning.
- Avoid forcing food and drink if they cause distress to the patient.
- Consider the patient’s current condition and nutritional status.

**Nutrition and hydration**

**Cultural and spiritual needs**

- Each person will have cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs that shape the care you provide.
- Be aware of the patient’s cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs.

**Ethical questions**

- Way of life of the patient, their family and their community.
- Respect for the patient’s autonomy.
- Right to make decisions.

**Key messages**

- Dying is a natural process.
- Respect patient’s wishes and decisions.
- Respect patients’ dignity and privacy.

**References**

- www.rcnendoflife.org.uk/resources
- www.rcneolnutritionhydration.org.uk/resources

**Getting it right every time**

Fundamentals of nursing care at the end of life.