

DEBUNKING DEHYDRATION

MYTH:

Not drinking enough fluids causes thirst and discomfort.

DEBUNKED:

Thirst is caused by dry mouth, not dehydration. Providing a small amount of fluid and gentle oral care is usually sufficient to provide comfort. Use an oral swab moistened with cool water to gently swab the inside of the mouth, the front of the tongue, and the lips.

MYTH:

Not giving fluids is neglectful.

DEBUNKED:

As the bodies systems begin to shut down with approaching death, fluids may build up and cause congestion and discomfort. This can make breathing uncomfortable and difficult for the patient. Studies have shown that terminally ill patients do not suffer when nutrition and hydration are withdrawn. In fact, advanced stages of dehydration may lead to the release of a compound from the brain which causes an analgesic effect.

MYTH:

Dehydration and starvation will lead to an unpleasant death.

DEBUNKED:

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, less swelling in the feet and legs, less fluid buildup in the stomach (so less nausea and vomiting), and less water buildup in the lungs, so fewer breathing problems.

MYTH:

Hydration increases alertness and comfort at the end-of-life.

DEBUNKED:

While hydration may increase alertness, it decreases the amount of natural analgesics which are released in the blood. This will not only take away from the body's natural analgesic effect but will make the patient more aware of the pain. Studies have revealed dehydrated patients are often more comfortable than those who are hydrated.

Withdrawing from food and fluid is a common, natural part of the dying process. Dehydration can actually have several potential benefits for a person who is at the end stages of his/her life. Some people feel they're deciding between life and death as they consider whether to provide hydration. However, toward the end of a serious illness, it's common for people to eat and drink less, if at all. They may also not feel the sensation of thirst. Dehydration is part of the normal process of the body shutting down.



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