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BRITISH SOCIETY OF
GASTROENTEROLOGY

Oral feeding difficulties and dilemmas

A guide to practical care, particularly
towards the end of life

Endorsed by the Association of British Neurologists, the British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition, the British Dietetic Association, the British Geriatrics Society, the Royal College of Nursing, and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Feeding is basic to life but it can also be an artificial medical procedure in the power of health professionals. Sometimes it causes dilemmas and strong differences of opinion between patients, relatives and professionals. This report is the result.

It acknowledges the confusion and uncertainty that sometimes surround decision-making and practice, including the difficulties of carrying out some of the technical interventions involved.

The report provides evidence-based guidance on the mechanisms and techniques of oral and artificial nutrition in health and disease. It sets out the ethical and legal concerns that provide the framework for decision-making. Case studies then illustrate dilemmas and solutions, for example on deciding whether to withhold or provide artificial nutrition.

This report is essential reading for all those involved in caring for people who have nutritional and oral feeding difficulties, including gastroenterologists, ward nurses, geriatricians, dietitians, speech therapists, neurologists, care home and community nurses, as well as carers, families and the patients themselves.

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Recommendations

Background: oral feeding • clinical issues
• oral feeding problems in different conditions • assessment • management
• strategies

Techniques of artificial nutrition • enteral nutrition • nasogastric versus gastrostomy feeding • parenteral nutrition • feeding techniques • general nursing care

Ethics • ethical principles • sanctity of life
• withholding and withdrawing
• best interests • euthanasia • killing and letting die • conscientious objection

Law • capacity • duty to provide 'basic care'
• how are 'best interests' determined?
• advance decisions • when to go to court

Practice • teams and responsibility
• specific medical conditions • who decides if the patient cannot decide? • dealing with disagreement • principles of practical management

