



# Northern Health Palliative Care

**HOT TIP**  
February  
2018

## Reduced Appetite/Weight Loss

Food is an important aspect of life. People depend on it to live. Over time people's relationship with food changes. As someone ages or approaches the end of life it is common to notice that interest/ability to eat decreases and eventually stops. This is often accompanied by cachexia, a metabolic condition resulting in weight loss. Dwindling appetite and weight loss are usually irreversible changes that are difficult for the patient/family and may cause conflict due to lack of knowledge.

### Care-Aide/PSW Role:

**Observe** for signs of decreasing appetite/lack of interest in food. Clients may report decreased interest in eating, skip meals, be eating smaller amounts or report everything tastes the same. Examine the patient's mouth for any sores, white patchy areas or difficulty with eating/swallowing.

Explore the **client/family's goals** for nutrition and their understanding of changes. **Record, report** and **refer** to dietitian, nurse or other health care member as appropriate.

(Murray, 2014)

### Supporting Patients and Families:

Before intake decreases, ensure family/patients have access to accurate information and are aware of natural processes. To also think about ways to spend time together not involving food.

As intake starts decreasing, empathize and listen to concerns the patient or family may be having. Also ask about preferred foods, and incorporate favourite foods into their meal plan. Discuss the importance of not focusing on how much the patient is eating but on the time spent together.

As appetite/intake decreases further offer small amounts of food more frequently. Encourage the person to eat when they choose to for comfort, not out of obligation to family.

Eventually the client will not eat or drink. This is a normal part of dying. Identify other ways, with the family, that they may care for their loved one that does not involve food **i.e.** providing them with a gentle massage, applying a favourite lotion to their hands/feet, playing music for them.

(Murray, 2014)

### Reference:

Murray, Katherine (2014) Integrating a Palliative Approach: Essentials for Personal Support Workers. Life and Death Matters