

# CATHOLIC TEACHING ON NUTRITION & HYDRATION



“As ecumenical witness in defense of life develops, a great teaching effort is needed to clarify the substantive moral difference between discontinuing medical procedures that may be burdensome, dangerous, or disproportionate to the expected outcome and taking away the ordinary means of preserving life such as feeding, hydration and normal medical care. The presumption should be in favor of providing medically assisted nutrition and hydration to all patients who need them.”

Pope John Paul II 1998

“The sick person in a vegetative state, awaiting recovery or a natural end, still has the right to basic health care (nutrition, hydration, cleanliness, warmth, etc.)... I should like particularly to underline how the administration of water and food, even when provided by artificial means, always represents a natural means of preserving life, not a medical act. Its use, furthermore, should be considered, in principle, ordinary and proportionate, and as such morally obligatory, insofar as and until it is seen to have attained its proper finality, which in the present case consists in providing nourishment to the patient and alleviation of his suffering... Death by starvation or thirst is, in fact, the only possible outcome as a result of their withdrawal. In this sense it ends up becoming, if done knowingly and willingly, true and proper euthanasia by omission.”

Pope John Paul II Address - International Congress  
“Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State” 2004

“Because human life has inherent value and dignity regardless of its condition, every patient should be provided with measures which can effectively preserve life without involving too grave a burden. Since food and water are necessities of life for all human beings and can generally be provided without risks and burdens..., the law should establish a strong presumption in favor of their use.”

USCCB 1986

“These statements agree that hydration and nutrition are not morally obligatory either when they bring no comfort to a person who is imminently dying or when they cannot be assimilated by a person’s body.

USCCB Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Workers

“In most case there is not an excessive burden in the artificial administration of nutrition and hydration. The total care of such patients may be a burden, but it is the burden of this particular treatment that must be judged, not the burden of the person’s life itself. We can never justify the withdrawal of sustenance on the basis of the quality of the life of the patient.”

Florida Bishops 1989

“Food and drink are modalities of ordinary care and not a treatment of a disease. Discontinuing nutrition and hydration for a patient who is not imminently dying violates in its intention the distinction between ‘causing death’ and ‘allowing death’.”

Catholic Medical Association