

FORCE FEEDING & LATE STAGE DEMENTIA

In late-stage dementia, the body focuses on keeping the heart, lungs, and brain “active” and minimal energy is spent on “non-essentials”. **At this stage, the body considers digestion to be non-essential.**

Forcing someone to eat can cause damage and pain. **Putting food in a person’s slack mouth is more likely to result in aspiration and is considered abuse.**

- **NOT Force Feeding:** If a patient opens their mouth when a spoon is pressed lightly at their lips, and they take in the food and swallow it.
- **Force Feeding:** If a caregiver must physically open a patient’s mouth to get food in.

When someone can’t communicate verbally, they nonverbally show us if they do or do not want to eat. **Examples of this nonverbal communication:**

Wanting to eat:

- Opening their mouth when a spoon or food touches their lips.

NOT wanting to eat*:

- Indifference to being fed.
- Turning their head away.
- Refusing (not willing) to open their mouth when a utensil or food touches their lips.
- Spitting food out.
- Coughing or choking.
- Closing eyes during feeding (and gentle touch of spoon to lips doesn’t produce voluntary mouth opening and closing).

**Stop the feeding if you observe this communication.*

