

# Medical Eating Program Overview



## What to expect during your child's hospital stay

### Why does my child need medical care?

Your child's body is starving. This may be because they were not eating or receiving enough food, or because they were exercising too much, or vomiting to try to get rid of calories. Their body is starting to break down tissue from the heart, brain, liver, intestines, kidneys, and muscle to get the energy and nutrients their body needs to work well. Your child's body is slowly starting to shut down. They need medical care and feeding right away to prevent life threatening health problems. During the hospital stay, our medical team will help your child follow a normal eating pattern that will help improve their health. We call this process refeeding. To refeed your child safely, they may stay in the hospital for 1 to 3 weeks.

### What are the signs and symptoms of starvation?

- To save energy, the starving body slows down and we see low heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature
- Weight loss
- Feeling very tired
- Thinking or speaking more slowly
- Being more irritable or showing personality changes

### How do you treat starvation?

We treat starvation by slowly increasing the amount of food your child eats in combination with checking their health. Increasing food amounts in this way helps to prevent Refeeding Syndrome (RFS).

### What is refeeding syndrome?

RFS is a dangerous complication that can happen in the first week after a person who has been starving, or not getting enough food, begins to receive food. Complications can arise when the body cannot accept the amount of nutrition and fluid provided. This is why we are careful when we start giving them food. This also explains why your child must eat and drink exactly what is sent and why we check weights, frequent labs (blood levels), and fluid intake and output (the liquid they get in their body and what comes out) very carefully.

### What will happen during my child's hospital stay?

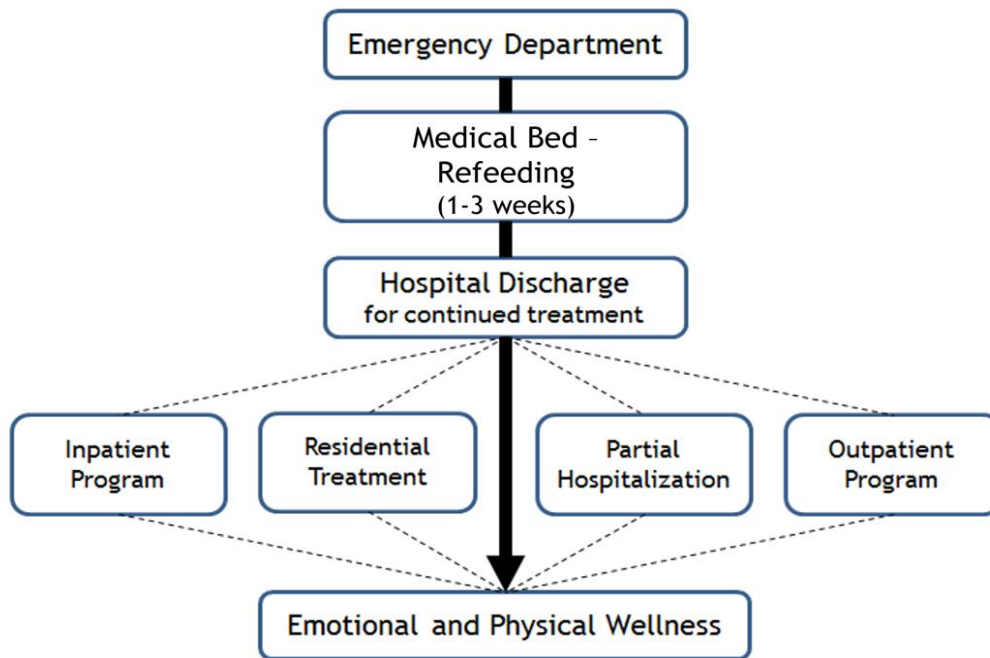
While your child is in the hospital we will learn more about their nutrition and the medical problems they are having. Our medical team will figure out what types of nutrients have been missing from your child's diet and how that is affecting their body (example: we may see very low heart rate, low body weight, or muscle weakness.) The medical team will help your child feel better by making sure they get the nutrition they need.

### What can my child expect each day to look like?

The refeeding program is organized and planned and will help improve your child's nutrition and bring their physical health back to normal. Treatment will include:

- Three meals and 2 to 3 snacks per day (provided by the hospital)
- 24-hour supervision
- A lot of bed rest to keep a calm body and save energy
- Heart rate checks
- Wearing hospital clothing
- Less time spent on internet and social media
- Participating in different types of supportive activities (art, reading, play, pet, relaxation, spiritual)

### Clinical Nutrition



## Who will care for my child?

The health care team includes many different people and specialists, including you. Each member of the team has an important part to play. Depending on your child's needs, they will see some or all of the providers listed here.

### You

You are an important part of your child's healthcare team. You know your child best. We will work with you to make decisions and treatment plans for your child. If you have any worries about your child's care or the treatment plan, please talk with your care team right away. We want to hear your concerns, and it is very important that we work as a team to help your child. It is helpful if you tell us your concerns about the nutrition and treatment plan in private, apart from your child.

### General Pediatrics

These are the medical doctors who are the primary medical team and will oversee your child's care and manage their daily treatment while in the hospital. There is a pediatrician in the hospital 24 hours a day, every day of the week.

### Adolescent Medicine

The medical doctors in this department specialize in the care of teenagers and young adults (ages 10 years and older) and are experts in refeeding patients with malnutrition. They will closely watch how the refeeding affects your child's body and will provide medical treatment as needed. They will also give advice about your child's treatment to the General Pediatricians when your child is no longer in the hospital.

### Nutrition

A Registered Dietitian will meet with you and your child to do a nutrition assessment. During the assessment, the dietitian will ask questions about what your child eats. They will set goals about how much food your child should eat and how much fluid they should drink. They will give you nutrition information and will also help you come up with a nutrition plan for home, if needed. The dietitian is here Monday - Friday, not on weekends or holidays.

### Psychiatry Team

This team includes medical doctors, psychologists, nurse practitioners, and social workers who specialize in mental health. They provide education, an evaluation of your child's mental health, emotional support, and will guide you on how to help with their general wellbeing. This team also provides recommendations, resources, and will coordinate the treatment your child needs after they leave the hospital. The psychiatry team is here Monday - Friday, not on weekends or holidays.

### Clinical Nutrition

### **Dysphagia Team**

This team includes speech language pathologists and occupational therapists who help patients and caregivers understand how eating and swallowing work, and help patients work through difficulties that may occur. This team will help your child participate in mealtime and build confidence to make eating easier and will help you learn strategies to support your child. The dysphagia team is here Monday - Friday, not on weekends or holidays.

### **Registered Nurse**

A licensed nurse supervises and provides most of your child's daily care. They are the main contact with other members of your child's healthcare team.

### **Care Partners**

Your child will have a care partner to supervise and support them 24 hours a day at first. Depending on how your child is doing, the medical team may decide to reduce the amount of time they spend with your child.

### **When will my child be ready for discharge or transfer?**

The medical team will consider discharge when these are met:

- Safe heart rate
- Gaining weight properly
- Eating and drinking the required amount based on the medical team recommendations
- Parent training and education
- Discharge or transfer plan in place\*

\*Please note, it may take time to set up appointments and resources for follow up care.

### **Clinical Nutrition**

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