

Frequently Asked Questions About Health Care for Hunger Strikers

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This flyer is intended to inform family members of hunger-striking prisoners what to expect with regard to health care for their loved ones during the hunger strike. The flyer explains the written policies of California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS) but cannot guarantee that the policies will be followed. These FAQs are based on two CCHCS documents:

- Policy 4.22.2: Mass Organized Hunger Strike (6/28/12)
- Mass Hunger Strike, Fasting, & Refeeding Care Guide (Sep.2012)

Is it true that there will be no monitoring of hunger strikers?

No. Each hunger striker will be observed daily by medical staff to determine whether immediate medical attention is needed. Two weeks after a prisoner has been deemed to be HS-ing, and weekly from then on, s/he will get a doctor visit and BMI (body mass index) will be measured.

Can a doctor stop a hunger striker's medications?

Yes. Reviewing the person's records, a doctor can adjust the dosage or even stop a medication entirely. This is because fasting affects how medications work in the body and what dosages are needed. It can be dangerous to take some medicines while fasting.

Some medicines that may be adjusted or stopped during fasting include:

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| – insulin | – NSAIDs |
| – hypoglycemia medications | – antacids |
| – blood pressure medications | – diuretics |

Will hunger strikers get nutritional supplements?

Medical staff will **not** prescribe meal replacements, milk, juice, or nutritional supplements during the HS, even for individuals who lose more than 10% of their body weight. After a prisoner begins to eat again, if s/he fails to gain weight, nutritional supplements/meal replacements may be prescribed.

Will hunger strikers get vitamins?

After three weeks of HS-ing, they will be offered thiamine (vitamin B1), B-complex, and a multi-vitamin.

When will hunger strikers get advance directives?

Two or three weeks after a prisoner is declared to be on HS, s/he will get information about advance directives and a Physician Order for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST). Also, if the HS-er accepts a doctor visit, the doctor will determine his/her capacity for informed consent.

As defined in Title 15, sec. 3353.1, being capable of informed consent means (1) being

aware that treatment or medication is recommended for a condition the patient has; (2) being able to understand the nature, purpose, and alternatives of the recommended treatment, medication, or medical procedures; and (3) being able to understand and discuss possible side effects and risks of medical recommendations.

Are hunger strikers going to be force fed?

Prior to *any* medical care, medical staff must obtain the prisoner's informed consent. This requires giving the prisoner information about his/her medical condition, the proposed treatment, and his/her prospects for recovery.

Medical staff **will not force feed** unless:

- The HS-er does not clearly and consistently indicate how s/he wishes to be medically managed, including whether s/he wants refeeding or resuscitation to be performed, **or**
- The HS-er is deemed unable to give informed consent. **and** CDCR gets a court order to force feed.

When a hunger striker decides to eat again, can s/he eat normally?

Someone who has fasted for over 28 days is considered at high risk for “refeeding syndrome,” and will probably be taken to a licensed medical facility. They will be monitored for fluid, electrolyte, and cardiac abnormalities. They will start with 10 calories per kg of body weight per day, increasing to three times that amount over the course of a week.

Others who are at high risk for “refeeding syndrome” include anyone who has other medical conditions, who has lost over 15% of his/her body weight or whose BMI has decreased to 16 kg/m² or less, or who has low potassium, magnesium, or phosphate levels.

If an individual is deemed of only moderate risk, s/he may eat half-size meals for the first two days, then eat normally.

How can I find out about my loved one's health?

Even a family member cannot get information about a prisoner's health unless s/he has authorized you to. To authorize you to receive information from his/her medical records, s/he must fill out a form 7385, “Authorization for Release of Information,” sign it, and give it to medical staff at the prison.

Once the patient has authorized you to get medical information, you can call the prison's medical department or the Inmate Health Care “Hotline,” (916) 691-1404.

Where can I get more information?

See the CCHCS website, www.cphcs.ca.gov. It has more information about the hotline, a link to form 7385, and complete text of policies and procedures documents for medical staff, medical care guides and guidelines, and patient information. (The documents on which this flyer is based are available from that website.)