

# Pro-life Basics

***My son-in-law's 80-year-old grandfather had a severe stroke. The doctors say half his brain is dead and he will never be able to eat, sit up, walk or take care of himself again. He never wanted to end up in a care facility, in a vegetative state. Is it acceptable to withhold a feeding tube from him?***

—Rita

The Catholic teaching on providing a feeding tube for those who are diagnosed as “brain-dead” is no different than for any other patient. In 2004, Pope John Paul II explained it thus:

The obligation to provide the “normal care due to the sick in such cases”... includes, in fact, the use of nutrition and hydration. The evaluation of probabilities, founded on waning hopes for recovery when the vegetative state is prolonged beyond a year, cannot ethically justify the cessation or interruption of minimal care for the patient, including nutrition and hydration. Death by starvation or dehydration 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. (“To the Participants in the International Congress on

**A patient in a “permanent vegetative state” is a person ... and must therefore receive ordinary and proportionate care which includes, in principle, the administration of water and food even by artificial means.**

‘Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State: Scientific Advances and Ethical Dilemmas.’” Go to [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father), click on John Paul II, then Speeches, then 2004, then March.)

In 2007, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reiterated this teaching:

A patient in a “permanent vegetative state” is a person with fundamental human dignity and must, therefore, receive ordinary and proportionate care which includes, in principle, the administration of water and food even by artificial means.

(“Responses to Certain Questions of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Concerning Artificial Nutrition and Hydration.” Go to [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia), click on Congregations, then Doctrine of the Faith, then Doctrinal Documents.)

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