

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



Standard Operating Procedures

Policy Name: Hunger Strikes

Policy Number: 507.04.64

Effective Date: 01/20/2022

Page Number: 1 of 3

Authority:
Commissioner

Originating Division:
Health Services Division
(Physical Health)

Access Listing:
Level I: All Access

I. Introduction and Summary:

Offenders who are mentally competent have the right to refuse to eat or take in liquids. The offender will be advised of the potential consequences of such action that includes death. This policy is applicable to all facilities that house Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) offenders to include private and county prisons.

II. Authority:

- A. GDC Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): 203.03 Incident Report; and
- B. NCCHC 2018 Adult Standard: P-G-05.

III. Definitions:

- A. **Hunger Strike** - Failure to accept solid nutritional support (food with caloric value) for a minimum of 72 hours (typically nine [9] consecutive meals) or any refusal of liquids in excess of 24 hours in duration regardless of if the failure is volitional or the result of mental illness.
- B. **Decision-Making Capacity** - The ability to understand and appreciate the nature and consequences of options and choices available regarding health care decisions, including the benefits and disadvantages of such choices, and to reach an informed decision regarding available choices.

IV. Statement of Policy and Applicable Procedures:

- A. Notification of Hunger Strike:
 - 1. When it becomes apparent by announcement or observation that a Hunger Strike is in progress, the Warden, Responsible Health Authority, and Shift Supervisor will be notified.
 - 2. The Responsible Health Authority will notify the Statewide Medical Director upon confirmation of the offender's intent to refuse to eat or take liquids.

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B. Health Record Review:

1. Upon notification, an advanced clinical provider will review the offender's health record, assess the offender's current physical and mental health status.
2. Any offender whose Decision-Making Capacity is in question will be referred for a mental health evaluation of sufficient depth to determine competency and to recognize any mental health problems requiring treatment. If the facility does not have sufficient mental health evaluation capability, the offender will be referred to an appropriate facility for evaluation.

C. Management of Hunger Strikes:

1. Offenders will be housed in a setting where the refusal or consumption of food can be observed and documented.
2. Every effort should be made by counselors and licensed health care personnel to convince the offender to resume taking food or liquids by mouth.
3. Meals will continue to be offered at the regular times throughout the Hunger Strike, and the responsible person making the offer will document the offering of each meal. The responsible physician, PA, or NP will review documentation in the health record of any food consumed by the offender either from the food trays or from other sources.
4. The offender's hydration and nutritional status will be assessed at least twice weekly by a Physician, PA, or NP. The offender will be weighed daily.
5. As the Hunger Strike progresses beyond seven (7) to ten (10) days, the responsible physician will determine whether or not the facility can provide an appropriate level of care to meet the offender's projected needs. The offender may then be transferred to another facility that can provide twenty-four-hour medical observation and response.

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6. Appropriate laboratory work (i.e., blood chemistries, CBC, etc.) and additional medical evaluation will be performed as clinically indicated. Refusal of any of these procedures will be documented in the health record.
7. If the offender loses Decision-Making Capacity, the medical staff will take appropriate medical measures (i.e., I.V. fluid administration, lab work, use of feeding tube, etc.).
8. Medical observation of offenders on Hunger Strikes can be terminated under the following circumstances:
 - a. The offender declares the Hunger Strike is over.
 - b. The offender starts taking food and is medically stable.

V. Attachments: None.

VI. Record Retention of Forms Relevant to this Policy: None.