Feeding Tube Use and Care (Pump Feedings)

Some cancer treatments can irritate the gastrointestinal tract, making it difficult to eat and digest food. A feeding tube may be used to provide nutrition during treatment. This handout explains how to properly care for feeding tubes and prevent problems like irritation, infection, or clogging.

Basic Tips for Using a Feeding Tube

• During feedings and when giving medications through the tube, sit up or position yourself so your shoulders are higher than your stomach. Do not lie flat on your back. Sitting upright and having your shoulders higher than your stomach can help reduce the risk for food accidentally getting into the lungs (aspiration) and stomach acid and food backing up from the stomach (reflux).

• Store formula for tube feeding at room temperature. Do not let it freeze.

• Opened cans of formula must be covered and stored in the refrigerator. Proper storage will reduce the risk for contamination and prevent spoilage. Throw away all unused formula from opened cans after 24 hours.

• If the formula is stored in the refrigerator, allow the formula to stand at room temperature for 15 to 20 minutes before a feeding. Very cold liquids may upset the stomach.
• Always wash your hands with mild soap and warm water before touching the feeding equipment, the formula, or giving medications.

• Keep the tube and the area around the tube clean.

• Always flush the feeding tube with water before and after each feeding, and before and after administering medications. Flushing the tube keeps it clean and prevents the tube from clogging.

• Call your health care team if you have diarrhea, constipation, nausea, vomiting, or skin irritation.

How to Clean Around Your Feeding Tube

Follow these directions every day to clean around your feeding tube:

1. Wash your hands with mild soap and water and dry them with a clean towel.
2. Wet a soft, clean cloth or gauze with warm, soapy water.
3. Gently wipe the skin around the tube with the cloth. Also clean the base of the tube.
4. Carefully clean the skin under the bumper with the cloth. Do not pull on the feeding tube.
5. Look for redness, swelling, bleeding, or leakage around the tube.
   If you notice any of these things, report them to your health care team immediately. Do not wait another day.
6. Rinse the area you cleaned with clear, warm water. (It is also safe to rinse off in the shower.)
7. Pat the area dry with another clean, soft cloth.
8. Apply a protective skin barrier or antibacterial ointment to the area around tube if you have been told to do so by your health care team.
9. Gently push the base of the tube against the skin and twist the tube in a circle. This step keeps the tube from sticking to the inside of the stomach.

10. When you are finished, wash your hands again with mild soap and water and dry them with a clean towel.

**How to Flush Your Feeding Tube**

To keep your tube clean and unclogged, you must flush it with warm water before and after feedings, and before and after medications are administered. Flushes also help you stay hydrated. If you are not currently using your feeding tube for feedings or medications, you will be asked to flush your feeding tube with water at least once a day to keep the feeding tube clean and working.

Use the following steps to flush your feeding tube before and after feedings. (Instructions for flushing your tube when administering medications are covered in the next section.)

1. Wash your hands with mild soap and water and dry them with a clean towel.
2. Fill a clean container with warm water.
3. Place the tip of a large feeding syringe in the water.
4. Draw 30 milliliters (mL) of water into the syringe.
5. Pinch or bend the end of the feeding tube to keep the contents from leaking out.
6. Open the cap on the feeding tube.
7. Insert the tip of the syringe into the feeding tube.
8. Unbend the tube to allow the water to flow in.
9. Gently and slowly push the plunger of the syringe down.
10. When the syringe is empty, pinch or bend tube to keep contents from leaking out. Then remove the syringe from the tube and close the cap on the feeding tube.

11. Tape the tube to your stomach with medical paper tape.

12. Wash your hands with mild soap and water and dry them with a clean towel.

How to Administer Medications Through a Feeding Tube

General Tips

- Check with your health care team before you take any medication through a feeding tube. Some medications should not be crushed, and a different prescription or form of the drug may be needed for use in a feeding tube.

- Do not mix medications together. Give each medication separately through the feeding tube and flush the tube with 30 milliliters (mL) of warm water before and after each medication.

- Before you give any solid medication through your feeding tube, thoroughly crush the medication and dissolve it in 60 mL of water. (See step 2 in the instructions on the next page.)

- Do not use the feeding tube for medications that should not be crushed (such as time-release medications).

- If you need to take medications at the same time as your tube feeding, give the medications half-way through the feeding. Make sure your hands are clean before administering medications.
Step-by-Step Instructions

Follow these directions for taking medications through a feeding tube:

1. Prepare each liquid medication, and put it in a reachable but safe place.
2. Separately prepare each medication that needs to be crushed before it is administered. Crush the medication and place it in 60 milliliters (mL) of warm water for 5 minutes before giving it through your feeding tube. Make sure the medication is thoroughly dissolved in the water before giving it.
3. Put enough warm water to flush the tube before and after each medicine is given in a clean container. You will need about ¼ cup of water for each medication you give yourself.
4. To flush the feeding tube:
   a. Pull the plunger out of your feeding syringe.
   b. Fill the feeding syringe with 30 mL of warm water.
   c. Bend or pinch the end of the feeding tube to prevent the contents from leaking out.
   d. Open the cap on the feeding tube.
   e. Put the tip of the syringe into the tube.
   f. Unbend the feeding tube and let the water run into your feeding tube.
5. After the tube is flushed, pour the liquid or crushed-and-diluted medication into the feeding syringe.
6. Hold the syringe straight up and let the medication run into the feeding tube.
7. Repeat step 4 to flush your tube again.
8. Repeat steps 2 through 7 for each medication, giving water, then the medication, then more water.
9. Remove the feeding syringe and close the feeding tube cap.
How to Give Tube Feedings by Pump

Tube feedings can be given by pump throughout the day and night (continuous feedings). Or they can be given for most of the day or night (intermittent feedings).

Feedings by pump may be used:

- If your feeding tube is placed in your small intestine.
- If larger amounts of feeding at one time make you nauseous.
- To accommodate your schedule or your caregiver’s schedule.

Some patients choose to do feedings only at night, because that is a time when they are at home and sleeping. If you choose night feedings, elevate the head of your bed 30 degrees to avoid aspiration while sleeping.

Others prefer to do feedings during the day only, so they can sleep flat in bed.

Follow these steps for tube feedings by a pump:

1. Wash your hands with mild soap and water and dry them with a clean towel.
2. Open only the cans of formula you need for the feeding. Wash the lid of the can with water and then dry the lid with a paper towel. Shake the can before opening it.
3. Pour the formula into the feeding bag. For sanitation reasons, only 8 hours’ worth of feeding is usually placed in the feeding bag at one time.
4. Cover and store leftover formula in the refrigerator to prevent contamination or spoilage.
5. Flush the tube:
   a. If you are using autoflushes (flushes provided frequently by the pump), put 8 hours’ worth of water in the water flush bag. If you have a tube into your stomach, use tap water for the flushes. If you have a J-tube (the tube enters your jejunum), you may need to use sterile water for flushes.
   b. Unclamp any clamps on the feeding tubing and the flush tubing.
   c. Turn on the pump, and let the feeding run down the tubing until it is almost to the end of the tubing. Then pause or shut off the pump. This step minimizes the amount of air placed into your stomach.
   d. Prepare a syringe of 30 milliliters (mL) of warm water to flush your feeding tube.
   e. Bend and pinch the end of the feeding tube leading from your belly to prevent the contents from leaking out.
   f. Open the cap on the feeding tube.
   g. Put the tip of the syringe used for flushes in the end of the feeding tube.
   h. Flush the tube with at least 30 mL of warm water.
   i. Repinch the feeding tube and remove the flush syringe.
6. Insert the tubing from the pump into your feeding tube.
7. Start the pump to begin feeding.
8. Once the feeding bag is almost empty, refill it with another 8 hours’ worth of formula. Also refill the water bag with another 8 hours’ worth of water, as needed.
9. If feedings are intermittent (not given continuously around the clock for 24 hours), the tubing will need to be flushed when a feeding ends to ensure that all formula is removed from the tube leading to your belly. Leaving
formula in the tubing can cause the tubing to clog. If dried formula totally
clogs the feeding tube, the tube may need to be removed and replaced.

   a. Pinch the tube and remove the syringe from the tube.

   b. Flush the tube with at least 30 milliliters (mL) of warm water.

   c. Close the cap on the feeding tube.

   d. Tape the tube to your stomach with medical paper tape.

   e. Discard the feeding tube and bag set. Use a new set every 24 hours.

10. Wash your hands with mild soap and water and dry them with a clean towel.

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