

Questions and Answers About Tube Feeding

What should I do if my tube feeding formula will not flow into the tube?

- Check your tube for kinks.
- If you use a pump, check that the battery is charged.
- If your feeding tube is clogged, flush your tube with room temperature water.
- If you use a syringe to give your formula, make sure to remove the cap on the syringe.
- If you have a clamp on your tube, make sure the clamp is open.

What should I do if my feeding pump does not work?

- Call the company who rents you the pump.

Can I eat if I have a feeding tube?

- Unless you have been told by your doctor or other member of your health care team that you should not eat, a feeding tube will not stop you from eating.

If I am not hungry, can I skip my tube feeding?

- **Try to avoid** skipping your feeding unless you feel full, bloated or sick to your stomach. If this feeling of fullness continues, tell a member of your health care team.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

Can medicines go down my feeding tube?

- Most medicines can go into your tube. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving medicines through your tube. **Medicine that are “extended release” or “sustained release” should never be crushed.**
- **Do not** mix your medicine with your tube feeding formula. Only mix your medicine with water.
- If you take more than one medicine, give each medicine one at a time.
- Rinse your tube before and after all the medicines that are given.

How do I know if my feeding is going in too fast?

- **If your feeding formula is given too fast**, you may feel full and bloated or have cramps, stomach pain or diarrhea.

What if I begin to choke, have trouble breathing, or cough up mucous?

- Sit up right away.
- Stop your feeding.
- Keep your head elevated so there is less risk that you will choke.
- **Call your doctor right away.**

What should I do if my tube becomes clogged?

- To prevent your feeding tube from getting clogged, it is important to always flush your tube:
 - ▶ Before and after each feeding.
 - ▶ Before and after giving each medicine. If you take more than one medicine, give each medicine one at a time.
 - ▶ If you are on a continuous pump, it is important to flush your feeding tube every 4 to 6 hours. Many pumps have separate bags that do this automatically.
 - ▶ At least 1 time each day even if you are not using it.

- Ask your doctor or dietitian about products that are available to clear clogs.
- If your tube is clogged follow these steps:
 - ▶ Use warm water and a syringe to flush your tube. Move the plunger on the syringe in and out several times to clear the clog.
 - ▶ If you can see the clog, rub your fingers along the outside of the tube to break up the clog.
- If your clog does not clear, call your doctor right away.

What should I do if formula is leaking around the tube onto my skin?

- If you see an increase in leakage around your tube or you are not able to control the leakage, **call your doctor**. Do not use the tube.
- A small amount of leakage can be normal for some patients. If the leaking suddenly increases or has an odor, call your doctor or a member of your health care team.

What can I do if I have problems with my skin around the tube?

- Keep the skin around your feeding tube clean and dry.
- If your doctor or dietitian has told you to use a dressing, it is important to change it at least one time each day or when it becomes wet or soiled.

What should I do if my feeding tube falls out or it is pulled out by mistake?

- **Call your doctor right away.**
- **Do not** use your feeding tube.
- If you go to the Emergency Department, take your tube with you.

What should I do if my tube moves in or out more than one inch?

- **Call your doctor.**
- **Do not** use your feeding tube if your tube has moved out of place.

How long can my feeding tube stay in place?

- Your doctor will tell you how long your feeding tube can stay in place. Each type of feeding tube is different.

What should I do if the area around my tube is red, swollen, tender or feels hard?

- **Call your doctor.**

What if I feel full, bloated, sick to my stomach or if I vomit?

- Hold all feedings. If this persists, call your doctor or dietitian to discuss.
- Try to have a bowel movement one time every 2 days. If you are struggling with this, call a member of your health care team to discuss.

What should I do if I have diarrhea?

- Check to see if your formula is going in too fast or you are getting too much formula at one time. You may need to slow down your feeding rate.
- If you are taking any medicines, check with your doctor or pharmacist to see if they can cause diarrhea.
- Check with your doctor or dietitian to see if you need a different kind of tube feeding formula.
- Note that if all of your nutrition is tube feeding, your stools may be different than when you were eating solid food. It is common for many to have smaller, softer, and more frequent stools than normal.

- **Call your doctor right away if you have:**

- ▶ Bright red blood in your stool
- ▶ Black stool or stool that looks like tar
- ▶ Pain in your abdomen

What should I do if I feel thirsty?

- Take all of your feeding formula and water as ordered.
- Talk with your doctor or dietitian about how much fluid you can put down your tube.

What if I am constipated?

- Check to make sure you are getting the right amount of water as ordered by your doctor or dietitian.
- Ask your dietitian about a tube feeding formula that has fiber.
- **Call your doctor** if you have constipation with no bowel movement for 3 days. Your doctor may order you medicine to help your constipation.