

Tube Feeding



A program of Community Hospice & Palliative Care
in collaboration with Northeast Florida hospitals

What is Tube Feeding?

When someone becomes unable to swallow due to illness or age, a tube can be placed through the nose to the stomach or directly into the stomach through a surgical opening in the abdomen to provide liquid nutritional supplements, medicine and water.

How is Tube Feeding done?

In order to provide food and fluids a tube is inserted directly into the stomach. This is called a feeding tube. The type of tube depends on how long artificial nutrition or hydration is needed:

- If only a few days: a nasogastric or NG tube is inserted through the nose to the stomach
- If more than a week: a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) tube is placed directly into the stomach through a small cut

What are the benefits?

- Useful for people recovering from surgery or sudden illness
- Useful for generally healthy people who require long-term nutritional support
- Relieves the pain of eating due to mouth or throat problems

What are the risks?

Some of the risks of feeding tubes include:

- Infection
- Damage inflicted if an agitated person attempts to pull the feeding tube out
- Risk of inhaling contents of the stomach into the lungs
- Tube feeding may not extend life and does not reverse the process of dying

Many people wonder if refusing a feeding tube will cause them to “starve to death.” It is important to know that very rarely do dying people report sensations of hunger. If a person has a life-limiting illness, and a feeding tube will not be a cure, than starting one may do more harm than good. At the end of life, the body becomes unable to use and process food and fluids. Your health care provider can help you and/or your loved ones with determining whether tube feeding is appropriate.

Consider these Questions

Everyone has the right to make their own health care choices and inform others of their wishes in the event they cannot speak for themselves someday. These are questions to think and talk about as you decide about tube feeding:

- What makes life meaningful for me?
- Under what conditions/situations would I want tube feeding?
- Under what conditions/situations would I not want tube feeding started?
- Would I want tube feeding if:
 - I have a terminal illness?
 - I have an end-stage medical condition?
 - I am unable to recognize my loved ones or know who I am?

Remember to inform your doctors, family and loved ones about your wishes and decisions regarding tube feeding as part of your advance care planning.