

# G-TUBE FEEDING GUIDELINES



Adjusting to the need for artificial feeding is challenging, whether the change is temporary or permanent. In this video in the Home Alone Alliance<sup>SM</sup> series, the caregiver says she is sad because she and her husband used to enjoy eating out and cooking at home. Because he has a gastrostomy tube (a G-tube), he is now unable to enjoy food the way he used to. G-tubes are surgically placed through the abdominal wall into the stomach.

G-tubes are one common type of tube feeding. They may be needed for different reasons, such as trouble swallowing due to a stroke or brain injury, cancer of the head or neck, or a neurological condition.

The video gives tips on managing the G-tube feeding process, troubleshooting possible side effects, and lessening the anxiety and emotional impact of tube feeding.

The dietitian recommends keeping a record of tube feedings, fluid intake, urine output, and bowel movements.

Here are some key points to remember:

- > The person should be sitting up as straight as possible.
- > Before feedings, flush the G-tube with at least 50 cc or one-fourth a cup of room temperature water, and follow the same procedure after the feeding.
- > Don't insert pills (whole or crushed) into the G-tube because they can block the tube.
- > Sodas and other carbonated beverages can also block the G-tube, so don't use them.
- > Liquid medications can be given through the G-tube but only after it's flushed with water. Follow the same flush procedure after giving the medication.
- > If the tube does become blocked, use warm water to flush the tube and gently loosen the clog.

Keeping the person's mouth moist may make him or her more comfortable. Brushing his or her teeth; using a swab to moisten the mouth; or, if he or she is able to swallow small amounts of liquid, offering an ice cube or sugar-free candy are good options.

To avoid symptoms such as bloating, cramps, nausea, or diarrhea, make sure the formula is at room temperature, not cold. If these symptoms do occur, follow these steps:

- > Stop feeding and wait an hour before restarting.
- > As the symptoms resolve, give half of the amount of formula, and double the usual water flush.
- > The formula feeding can be given at a slower rate to see if this prevents the symptoms.
- > If symptoms persist for more than 24 hours, contact the person's primary care provider.

To deal with constipation, try the following:

- > Increase the amount of water.
- > Administer 60 milliliters (2 ounces) of prune juice followed by the same amount of water flush. You can use half or twice the amount of juice as needed.
- > Tell the person's health care provider about the constipation.
- > A laxative or different formula with added fiber may be recommended.

To prevent dehydration, do the following:

- > In addition to the water for flushing before and after each feeding, another 1 to 2 cups of water may be needed.
- > Check that the person's urine is clear and light yellow.
- > Check for dehydration by gently pinching the skin on the back of the person's hand. It should settle back down quickly, not stay up like a tent.
- > Tell the person's health care provider if symptoms of dehydration persist.

Also check the stoma (the area where the tube is inserted in the stomach) for signs of infection, such as redness or swelling. Keep the area clean.

Although the person is no longer able to eat, he or she can still enjoy the social aspects of mealtime with the family. G-tube feedings can be incorporated into a daily routine and can allow the person to continue many prior activities. As a caregiver, you play an essential role in this process. Ask for help from a dietitian or nurse if you have questions or concerns.

## Additional Resources

The Cleveland Clinic offers a booklet about tube feeding at [https://my.clevelandclinic.org/ccf/media/files/Digestive\\_Disease/center-human-nutrition/home-enteral-nutrition-booklet.pdf](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/ccf/media/files/Digestive_Disease/center-human-nutrition/home-enteral-nutrition-booklet.pdf).

Living with Tube Feeding Your New Normal is a website created by Nutricia Advanced Medical Nutrition that has useful information for adapting to tube feedings. Although the site is intended for British users, the information is applicable to Americans as well. Go to <http://www.tube-feeding.com/FAQ/>.

Another website produced by a company that markets tube feeding formula is Tube Feeding at Home at <https://www.vitalitymedical.com/pdf/feeding-instructions.pdf>. This site has a useful chart for personalized instructions.

The Oley foundation has resources for those living with home Tube Feeding (Home Enteral Nutrition). [https://oley.org/page/HEN\\_LandingPage](https://oley.org/page/HEN_LandingPage).

Go to [www.AARP.org/NoLongerAlone](http://www.AARP.org/NoLongerAlone) for more information.

*AARP Public Policy Institute*

*Prepared by Carol Levine, United Hospital Fund*