

Tube Feeding

What you should know

As you get older or have health problems, you may not be able to swallow normally or take in enough food or water. If you want food and water, you can choose to receive them by tubes.

This fact sheet can help you decide if you want to try tube feeding. The time to make this choice is when you feel well and have the facts you need. Ask questions and talk with your doctor and others. Think about what being alive means to you.

Tube feeding may or may not work for you. There may be side effects. The doctor who knows you best can help you make your decision.

What is a tube feeding?

Tube feeding methods include:

- A tube put through your nose into your stomach OR
- A tube put through the skin into your stomach.

Food and water are slowly and gently pumped through these tubes.

Does a tube feeding work?

Tube feeding may or may not work for you.

Tube feeding works best if:

- You are healthy.
- You need tube feeding for a short time to recover from surgery or a sudden illness.

Tube feeding does not work as well if:

- Your body is becoming weak from chronic health problems.
- You have an illness that can no longer be treated.
- You are older and weak.

You may have fears about not getting food or water. You may think you will starve or be uncomfortable. This is not true. When food and water are not given, you will die naturally from your chronic illness. You will not feel hungry, and you will receive good care to make you comfortable.

Your faith may be important to you. If so, talk to a leader from your faith community.

What else can happen with a tube feeding?

Tube feeding can have these side effects:

- Food can spill over into your lungs and cause infection.
- If your body is not working well, it can't use food and water, and fluids can build up.
- Fluids that can build up in your lungs, stomach, hands, and other places can be uncomfortable.
- Your hands may need to be tied down so you don't pull the feeding tube out.

You should talk to your doctor about these side effects.

If you want to try tube feeding:

Before you decide, think about what should be done if tube feeding doesn't work. What if your health gets worse? What if you cannot think or talk? Would you want to stop tube feeding if these things happen? Talk to your doctor and family about what you would want them to do.

If you decide you do not want tube feeding:

You will still get the care you need. You may have a dry mouth and a sense of thirst. You will be given good mouth care and ice chips to help. There are many choices you can make to help you live as well as possible and remain comfortable.

If you do not want to try the tube feeding, you need to tell your doctor and family. Plans can be made to follow your wishes.



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