Questions and Answers about Tube Feeding

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

- Check if your equipment is working.
- Check the pump and tubing for kinks or problems.
- Disconnect from the pump and check for stomach residuals to see if your stomach is too full.
- Check stomach residuals every 8 hours or as ordered by your doctor.
- Flush your feeding tube with room temperature water to unplug it.

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

- Call the company who rents you the pump to fix the problem. Hang the bag or bottle of feeding and regulate the drip using the roller clamp on the IV tubing so you do not miss a feeding.

Can I eat while I am getting tube feeding?

- Check with your doctor before trying to eat.

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

- **Do not** skip your feeding unless you feel unusually full, bloated or nauseated.
- If you feel full, check your stomach residual. Your doctor will tell you the amount of residual that is okay for you to have before each feeding.

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

How do I know if I am getting enough tube feeding?

- You should not feel hungry if you are getting enough feeding.
- Weigh yourself at least once a week. If you lose 2 pounds or more, call your doctor.

Can medicines go down the tube?

- Medicines can go down the tube. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving medicines through your tube. Some medicines cannot be crushed or mixed with feeding formula.
- Always rinse the tube before, between and after all the medicines that are given.

How do I know if the feeding is going in too fast or too slow?

- **If the feeding is given too fast**, you can feel full, bloated, have cramps, stomach pain or diarrhea.
- **If the feeding is given too slow**, you may not get enough calories and could start to lose weight.

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

- It is possible that some of the tube feeding has gotten into your lungs.
- If you have trouble breathing:
  - Sit up right away
  - Stop the feeding
  - Relax and take slow, deep breaths
  - If choking continues, pull the tube out of your nose
  - Keep your head and tube feeding site elevated so there is less risk of choking.
  - **Call your doctor right away**
What should I do if I do not get any stomach residual?
• If your stomach is empty, you will not get any residual.
• Flush your feeding tube with room temperature water to make sure it is not plugged.

What should I do if I get too much stomach residual?
• Check with your doctor about the amount of residual that is okay for you to have.
• **Call your doctor right away** if you have nausea, bloating or vomiting.

What should I do if my tube becomes clogged?
• To prevent the tube from getting clogged, always flush the tube:
  ▶ With room temperature water at least 4 times a day
  ▶ Before and after each feeding
  ▶ Before, in between and after giving each medicine.
  ▶ Ask your doctor about liquid forms of medicines.
  ▶ To help open a clogged tube, flush the tube with room temperature water. Gently pull back and forth in the tube using a push/pull method.
• **Call your doctor** if the tube stays clogged after trying to flush it.

What should I do if formula is leaking around the tube onto my skin?
• **Call your doctor.** Your stomach may be too full or the tube may be out of place.

What should I do if my feeding tube falls out or it is pulled out by mistake?
• **Call your doctor or right away.** The tube must be replaced as soon as possible.
• If you go to the Emergency Department, take the tube with you.
What should I do if my tube is moving in or out more than one inch?

- Sometimes the tube may dislodge or move out of position. **Call your doctor** if the tube has moved out of place 1 inch or more.
- Keep the tube in place by taping it to your skin so that it does not move.

How long can the feeding tube stay in place?

- Each type of tube is different as to how long it can stay in place. Check with your doctor about the type of tube you have and how long you will need it.

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

- Keep the skin around your feeding tube clean and dry.
- Change the dressing and tube holder if they get wet or dirty.
- Use a waterproof ointment such as Desitin or zinc oxide to help protect your skin.

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

- **Call your doctor.** Your feeding tube may be out of position.

What should I do if my stitches come loose?

- **Call your doctor.** Tape the tube so it does not slip out.

What if I feel full, nauseated, bloated, or if I vomit?

- Check your stomach residuals. Follow the advice from your doctor about the amount of residual that is okay for you to have.
- Make sure your bowels are moving at least every other day.
- Check the rate of the feeding. It may be going in too fast. **Call your doctor.** You may do better with using a pump to help with your feedings.
What should I do if I have diarrhea?

- Check to see if the feeding is going in too fast or you are getting too much at one time. **Call your doctor.** You may need to slow down the feeding rate or use a drip method.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist to see if you are taking any medicines that can cause diarrhea, such as antibiotics.
- Check with your doctor to see if you need a different kind of tube feeding formula.
- Protect your rectal area with waterproof ointment such as Desitin® or Zinc Oxide.
- **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 directed by your doctor.
- Talk with your doctor or dietitian about when to take more or less liquids down your tube.

What if I am constipated?

- Take a stool softener or use a lubricant on a regular basis to help prevent constipation.
- Talk with your dietitian about tube feeding formula that has fiber.
- **Call your doctor** if you have constipation with no bowel movement for 3 days.