Feeding Tube Placement
Answers to your Questions
What is a feeding tube?
A feeding tube is a tube that is inserted into the stomach (gastric) or small bowel (duodenal or jejunal) that is used to provide food, liquid and/or medications. Some tubes are used short-term (less than six weeks) and are typically placed through the nose. Other feeding tubes are placed for long-term use (greater than six weeks) and are inserted directly through the abdomen into the stomach or small bowel. For some people who have long term feeding tubes, there is the possibility of transitioning to a low profile feeding tube (a feeding tube that is smaller and sits closer to the skin) in the future.

Why get a feeding tube?
There are several situations when a feeding tube might be recommended, including:

- Significant problems with chewing or swallowing food and/or liquids
- Eating has become a tiring activity
- Current food and/or fluid intake does not meet required needs
- Continued weight loss

Note that in some circumstances, people with feeding tubes may continue to eat and/or drink.
When should I get a feeding tube?

- Eating, drinking and/or taking medications orally leads to frequent coughing and/or choking
- Poor intake due to fatigue and/or difficulty eating
- Dehydration from insufficient fluid intake
- Problems that interfere with chewing or swallowing
- Prolonged need for nutrition support

Why not get a feeding tube?

When the risk of the procedure outweighs the benefits, it would not be recommended.

There are certain medical situations where feeding tube placement may not be possible (e.g. severely malnourished, if your breathing muscles are very weak).

If, after receiving all the information, the idea of tube feeding is not acceptable to you, then perhaps a feeding tube is not right for you. Please discuss this further with your healthcare provider or dietitian.

Note that a feeding tube will not completely eliminate the risk of aspiration or aspiration pneumonia. Aspiration is when material such as food, drink or saliva enter the airway and/or lungs. When this happens, it can potentially cause a lung infection such as pneumonia.

Benefits of a feeding tube

- Decreased risk of coughing/choking, chewing or swallowing problems from eating, drinking and/or taking medications
- Improved nutritional status, resistance to infection and weight maintenance
- Improved hydration, which is important for general health, bowel and bladder function
- Better use of energy – energy used for eating can be used for other activities
- Potential for increased quality of life
The Procedure

Placing the feeding tube is an out-patient procedure requiring local anaesthetic and mild sedation. It is recommended that it be done in conjunction with an inpatient hospital stay for further assessment to monitor how you manage feeding and breathing.

Managing the Tube

You will be taught how to give food, liquid and medications through the feeding tube. You will also be shown how to keep the insertion site clean, check for infection, clean the tube, prevent and manage blockages in the tube, as well as how to clean and maintain any other equipment required for feeding.

What to put through the tube?

Whether you take some or all of your nutritional requirements through the tube, you will have to flush it with water daily to keep it clear. If you are receiving all of your nutrition (food) by formula, you will flush the tube with water before and after each feeding. The amount depends on your fluid requirements, the volume of formula and on how much you are able to drink orally.

You will be given a recommendation for a liquid formula designed for feeding through the tube. There are a number of products available on the market designed to provide all the nutrients (protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals) in amounts that meet your requirements. Some people may also choose to administer blenderized food through the feeding tube in place of, or as a supplement to, commercial formula.
The dietitian will assess your calorie and fluid needs and will recommend a formula and advise you on the best method to administer your tube feedings. You can purchase your tube feeding formula and supplies at a medical supply store as recommended by the dietitian.

**Administration methods**

Feeding schedules can be different depending on personal preference, lifestyle and nutritional requirements. Since everyone is unique, a feeding/eating plan is developed on an individual basis and is adjusted as often as is required due to changing circumstances. Feeding can be done continuously throughout the day and night or several times a day.

**Other considerations**

In BC, the cost of formula, supplies and equipment is not covered (except for those receiving social assistance) and for many families, this can create a financial challenge. For this reason, the cost of tube feeding formula and equipment should be considered.

For those individuals with decreased hand function and/or who are dependent for their care needs, someone else will need to take on the responsibility of administering tube feedings. Unfortunately, in the community not all home care workers can be trained to give tube feedings. Check with your Home Care team to see what supports are available.

**The decision is yours**

If you choose to have a feeding tube, you decide when it will be used. If you choose not to have a feeding tube, your health care provider will support your decision and will continue to assist you in finding foods and fluids that you can manage. You may also choose to have the feeding tube removed in the future.

If you have any other questions please talk to your healthcare provider or dietitian.