

# Gastrostomy Care

## General Information

Gastrostomy feeding is used when you are unable to eat food by mouth. The gastrostomy tube is inserted into your stomach during surgery. The tube is usually stitched into place. You will have the tube until it is no longer needed.

## How to Feed Yourself

Gastrostomy feeding involves 4 steps.

### ■ Prepare the equipment.

- Wash your hands with soap and water before handling any food or equipment. Prepare your feeding according to your health care provider's advice.

Use \_\_\_\_\_.

- Place the following items on a clean table:
  - clean syringe with plunger
  - your feeding in a cup or glass bowl
  - clamp or plug.

### ■ Check for aspirate (stomach contents).

- To determine the amount of contents in your stomach, attach the syringe to the gastrostomy tube. With the syringe in place, slowly pull back on the plunger until you meet resistance. This will cause your stomach contents (the aspirate) to enter the syringe. If your stomach is empty, nothing will be withdrawn. If your stomach is not empty note how much can be withdrawn and slowly push it back.

- If, for 2 feedings in a row, the amount of aspirate is equal to or greater than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the amount you take in one feeding, call your health care provider.
- After you detach the syringe, remove the plunger and replace the empty syringe onto the gastrostomy tube.

### ■ Feed yourself.

- Find a comfortable place to sit. Arrange your supplies so everything is within easy reach.
- Pour some feeding into the syringe attached to the tube. You will likely need to use the plunger to give the feeding a slight push so it starts to flow down the tube to your stomach. After the feeding starts to flow, do not use the plunger unless you need to restart the flow. Hold the syringe about 4 inches above your stomach.
- Let the feeding slowly flow from the syringe into the tube. Do not let the feeding flow in too fast or you may become uncomfortable.
- The clamp may be used to regulate the flow of feeding into your stomach.
- Instead of a clamp, you may use your fingers to pinch off the gastrostomy tube.
- If you cough during a feeding, the feeding will back up into the syringe. This is normal.

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- When you have taken the prescribed amount of feeding, flush the tube by putting 15 to 20 cc of water in through the syringe. Disconnect the syringe from the gastrostomy tube and clamp it shut or use a catheter plug.
- Resting on your right side for about 30 minutes after the feeding will help your stomach to empty. Be sure to keep sitting at a 45-degree angle. Secure the gastrostomy tube to your abdomen so there is no extra tension at the site.

■ **Clean the equipment.**

- Soak the syringe and plunger in warm, soapy water for about 20 minutes.
- Rinse the syringe and plunger well and let them air dry.
- Do not boil or place them in the dishwasher. They are plastic and may melt or crack. Each syringe can be used for several days if they are well washed, rinsed and dried between feedings.

**How to Change a Dressing**

The gastrostomy dressing should be changed:

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If you notice any drainage or unusual redness around the gastrostomy tube, call the doctor. Call your health care provider if these symptoms get worse instead of better after several days.

To change a dressing, follow these instructions:

- **Prepare the supplies.** Wash your hands with soap and water before handling any supplies. Put these supplies on a clean table:

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■ **Remove the old dressing.**

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■ **Clean the skin around the tube.**

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■ **Replace the dressing.**

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**Special Concerns**

- You may take oral (by mouth) medicines prescribed through the gastrostomy tube. If the medicine is a tablet, crush it well. Mix the crushed tablet in a small amount of water and pour it into the gastrostomy tube. Rinse the tube with a small amount of cranberry juice or water to make sure you receive all the medicine.
- If the gastrostomy tube accidentally falls out, place a clean gauze dressing over the opening and tape it in place. Do not worry about any fluid that leaks. Call your health care provider.

Do not try to replace the tube yourself. This is not a medical emergency, but a health care provider should replace the tube into your stomach within a day before the opening has a chance to begin to close.

- Call \_\_\_\_\_ if you have questions.