

A large, abstract graphic on the left side of the page, composed of several thick, curved purple lines that resemble a stylized smile or a series of concentric arcs.

You and your gastrostomy feeding tube

Rehabilitation and Support

A guide for patients and carers

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This information leaflet is for patients attending The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre who have a gastrostomy feeding tube. This leaflet gives advice on gastrostomy tube care and aims to answer any questions you may have.

Skin care

Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly before you handle your feeding tube and any equipment.

- 48 hours after the tube has been placed you can remove your dressing and shower, as normal.
- Do not take a bath until the tube has been in for three weeks and the stoma is fully formed and healed.
- The stoma is the term used for the area around the tube where it goes into the stomach. If you do not wish to shower, you should clean the area behind the plastic fixation device that lies on your abdomen gently with mild soap and water, rinse and dry thoroughly each day. Don't use any talcum powders or creams as they can irritate the skin and lead to infection.
- After the first two weeks the stoma has formed and healed inside and the plastic fixation device can then be gently pulled away from the skin to clean it properly underneath. You can do this several times a week. You can also start to rotate the tube daily in a full circle and gently pull the tube in and out a couple of centimeters. This daily process helps the stoma to stay healthy and mobile (your nurse will demonstrate how to do this).

- After cleaning, the fixator device should be replaced back to its original position. It is important that the fixator is not too loose or too tight as this can irritate your skin. Your nurse will advise you about the appropriate positioning of the fixator device.
- Observe for any signs of redness, swelling, irritation, skin breakdown or soreness around the tube site. If the skin becomes painful to touch please seek medical advice or contact your nurse.
- Dressings should not normally be used as they can encourage the growth of bacteria, however if infection or leakage is present a dry absorbent dressing may be required. Your nurse can advise you about this. Dressings should be supplied by your GP.

Daily tube care

- Check your tube daily for any slits or blockages along it. Flush your tube at least daily with 50mls of water that has been boiled and allowed to cool. This will help to prevent it from becoming blocked.
- If you are using your tube to feed through, always flush 50mls of water that has been boiled and allowed to cool before and after every feed.
- 50mls of soda water can be flushed through the tube once a week to help prevent a build-up of feed in the tube and prevent tube blockage. If your tube does become blocked try using soda water or warm water. Do not use excessive force - if your tube does not unblock seek medical advice or tell your nurse.



- If you have a tube with a clamp on, you are advised to leave the clamp open at all times when you are not feeding. This is because leaving the clamp on all the time can cause a dent or weakness in the tube.
- Avoid excessive handling of the adaptor at the end of the tube. Some of these can be replaced by your Community Dietitian or nurse if they become worn or damaged.

Feeding with your tube

This may be by feeding pump or by syringe known as bolus feeding. Your dietitian will advise you about which method of feeding is most suitable for you.

- Make sure when you are having your feed, and for at least one hour after feeding, you are sitting up or propped up at an angle of at least 45 degrees to prevent regurgitation of feed.
- Please check with your Community Dietitian about how often to replace your syringe for flushing as this can vary according to where you live. It is important that you wash the syringe thoroughly after each feed in hot soapy water, then rinse and dry thoroughly and store in a clean dry place.
- If you are feeding by pump method, remember to change your giving set every 24 hours.
- If feeding overnight, you will need additional fluid during the day especially in hot weather (please check with your Dietitian if you are on restricted fluids). Remember that you will need to sleep propped up at an angle of at least 45 degrees.

Medication

If you are putting any medicines down your tube, always use a 50ml syringe as this causes less pressure on the balloon in your gastrostomy tube. You can use a smaller syringe to measure with. Oral medication in liquid form can be given through the tube, but this should be diluted with equal volumes of water. Soluble and dispersible medicines can also be given through your feeding tube.

- Give your medicines one at a time with at least 50mls of water before and after and at least 10mls in between each medicine to prevent the tube from becoming blocked.
- It is important that you wash the syringe thoroughly after administering medication in hot soapy water, then rinse and dry thoroughly and store in a clean dry place.
- Check with your pharmacist if you have any queries about a particular medication going down your tube.

Keeping your mouth clean

You will need to keep your teeth and mouth clean during your treatment.

- If you have had surgery, are having chemotherapy or undergoing radiotherapy to your head or neck, the Specialist Nurse will advise you individually about how to clean your mouth and will tell you what you should and should not use.
- Brush all the surfaces of the teeth, gums and tongue at least twice a day using your regular toothpaste and toothbrush.



- Try not to lick your lips as it can make drying or chapping worse.
- To moisten the lips use lip balm.
- Mouthwash may help if your mouth is dry. Do not use mouthwashes containing alcohol as they may cause pain in your mouth.
- Always seek medical advice or inform your Specialist Nurse if you experience problems with mouth care.

Frequently asked questions about gastrostomy feeding tubes

Why do I need a feeding tube?

Due to your condition or treatment you may become unable to take enough food and drink by mouth to meet your requirements. A gastrostomy tube is a tube which is inserted into your stomach to allow you to replace the food you can no longer manage.

How long will the tube last?

This depends on the type of feeding tube you have in place. Some feeding tubes last up to three years. Balloon gastrostomy tubes can last for up to six months, but are usually changed every three months. Your nurse will be able to advise you on your individual tube.

Will I receive anything else through the tube?

Depending on your condition, you may require extra fluids and or medicines through your feeding tube. Do not put anything other than feed, water or diluted medications down your tube.

When can the tube be removed?

Before the tube can be removed, we must make sure that you are able to manage enough food and fluids by mouth to meet your body's requirements. Removal of the tube will be fully discussed with you, as and when the time is appropriate. The procedure to remove the tube will vary slightly depending on your condition. Your Community Dietitian will continue to give you advice once you have finished your treatment at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre.

Who will help me at home?

Most people who have a tube manage with very little help after training. Your relatives, friends or carer can be trained to give you help. When you leave hospital arrangements will be made for regular check-ups. Your feed and equipment will be arranged by a dietitian and it will be delivered by a nutrition company or local pharmacy.

What can I put down the tube?

Normal food should not be put down your tube, or any bought supplements. A dietitian will prescribe specially prepared, sterile feed that comes in either carton or bottles. A dietitian will work out a feeding regime for you.

Will I be able to move around freely if I am on a pump feed?

Yes, you can move your pump around freely with you, as long as you keep your battery fully charged.



What should I do if my tube falls out?

Immediately stop any feed. You must attend your nearest Accident and Emergency department urgently if your tube has been in place for less than three weeks.

If your tube has been in place for three weeks or more you will need to contact your District Nurse or Community Dietitian for immediate advice.

Whilst undergoing treatment at CCC you can contact the Nutrition Nurse Practitioner during office hours Monday - Friday on 0151 556 5323 for advice if your tube falls out.

However, if you are unable to contact your District Nurse, Community Dietitian or Nutrition Nurse it is important that you attend your nearest Accident and Emergency department immediately. If in any doubt, contact the hospital where your tube was first placed.

Your nurse will complete the table opposite with information about your tube. You can show this information to your District Nurse or Community Dietitian.

Information about your tube

Date of placement:	
Tube placed by:	
Placed at:	
Manufacturer:	
Tube size:	
Balloon volume:	



How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.

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