Tube Feeding Using Gravity

This handout provides information about your feeding tube. Tube feeding formula is a liquid source of nutrition. It provides calories, protein, water, vitamins and minerals.

Your tube feeding will be given using gravity. There are 2 methods that can be used for gravity feedings:

1. **By gravity bag:** Uses a feeding bag and tubing which you hang above the level of your stomach. Gravity will move the formula from the bag into your feeding tube. These feedings are usually given multiple times per day, several hours apart and usually last 30 minutes. The feeding rate can be increased or decreased based on how open the roller clamp is set.
2. **By syringe:** Uses a large syringe to deliver formula. Gravity allows the formula to slowly move from the syringe into the feeding tube. Syringe (or bolus) feedings, may be given multiple times a day, several hours apart and usually take 15-30 minutes. Most people who can tolerate a gravity bag feeding, can eventually transition to a syringe feeding easily.

My Tube Feeding Plan

My formula is called: _____

My feeding Method

- Gravity bag
- Syringe

My Schedule

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My Hydration

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Steps for Using a Gravity Bag

1. Wash your hands with soap and water. Dry them with a clean towel.
2. Use room temperature formula. Cold formula may cause stomach upset.
3. Wash the lid of the container. Dry the lid with a clean towel.
4. Check the roller clamp to ensure that the tubing is pinched closed.
5. Shake the container(s) before opening.
6. Pour the formula into the feeding bag. **Do not** put more than 2 containers (or about 500 mL) of formula into the feeding bag. Close the lid on the feeding bag. Hang the bag on a pole/hook at least 12 inches higher than your stomach.
7. Open the cap on the feeding tube. Using a syringe, insert at least 30 mL of warm water into your tube.
8. Remove the syringe. Connect the tubing from the feeding bag into the feeding tube.

9. During feedings, sit upright so that your shoulders are higher than your stomach. Sit in a chair or prop yourself up in a bed or on the couch. Never lie flat on your back during feedings.
10. Unclamp the tubing coming from the feeding bag. Control the flow rate by using the roller clamp. A good rate to start at is 1-2 drips per second. You may control the speed of flow based on your comfort.
11. Once your feeding is finished, clamp the tube. Remove the tubing from the feeding bag and unhook the feeding from your tube.

Cleaning

1. Flush your tube with at least 30 mL of warm water. Close the cap on your feeding tube.
2. Rinse the feeding bag and tubing with water. Then, swish with warm water and a small amount of liquid dish soap. Rinse and allow to air dry.
3. Clean the syringe with warm, soapy water. Allow to air dry completely.

Change the tube feeding bag every 3 days. Change the syringe each week.

Steps for Using a Syringe

1. Wash your hands with soap and water. Dry them with a clean towel.
2. Use room temperature formula. Cold formula may cause stomach upset.
3. Wash the lid of the container. Dry the lid with a clean towel.
4. Open the cap on the feeding tube. Using a syringe, insert at least 30 mL of warm water into your tube.
5. Remove the plunger from the syringe. With the syringe still in the tube, fill the syringe with formula. Allow the formula to flow slowly into your feeding tube like a funnel. Adjust the flow rate by gently pinching the feeding tube or raising/lowering the height of the syringe. **Do not** use the plunger of the syringe to force formula into the tube. This can cause bloating and pain.
6. Repeat step 5 as many times as needed to complete the feeding. It will take about 4 full syringes to finish 1 container of formula, or about 15 minutes.

Cleaning

1. After the feeding is complete, flush tube with 30 mL of warm water. Close the cap on your feeding tube.
2. Clean the syringe with warm, soapy water and allow to air dry completely.
3. Change the syringe each week.

Water Flushes

Your body needs enough fluid each day to stay hydrated. Your tube feed formula will provide some fluids. The rest of your fluid will be met by oral intake (if safe) and/or by doing water flushes through your feeding tube. You may not be getting enough fluid if you have: dizziness, dry mouth, dry lips, lower urine output than normal and darker urine.

Medicines

You can give medicine through the feeding tube if you cannot swallow them. Follow these instructions:

1. **Do not** add medicine directly to the formula. Give each medicine one at a time. **Do not** mix medicines together.
2. Flush the tube with 30 mL water before giving a medicine. Flush with 10 mL water between each medicine. Flush with 30 mL water after giving last medicine.

3. **Check with your pharmacist or provider to see if your medicines can be crushed.** If so, crush and dissolve pills in at least 30 mL water before flushing them through the tube. Flush the tube again with 30 mL water after you give the medicine.

When to Call

- **The tube clogs.** Your tube may clog at times because of medicines or if you are not flushing with water often enough. First try to flush the tube with 30 mL of warm water. Never force fluid into the tube. If this does not unclog the tube, call your provider's office or go to Urgent Care or emergency room if outside of office hours.
- **Tube falls out.**
- **You are losing weight.** Weigh yourself 3 times a week at the same time of day on the same scale. Early morning is best, after urinating. Keep a record of your weight. If you notice weight gain or loss of more than 2-3 pounds per week, contact your healthcare team.
- **Nausea or upset stomach** for more than 24 hours.
- **Diarrhea:** 3 or more loose, watery bowel movements for more than 2 days.
- **Constipation:** no bowel movement for more than 5 days.
- Anything that causes you to stop giving tube feedings for more than one day.

Who to Call

After leaving the hospital, you may need a follow-up clinic visit with a registered dietitian to review your progress and update your feeding plan.

If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan. For a list of UW Health Clinics, please visit www.uwhealth.org/.

You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Tube Feeding Resources

- Gravity Tube Feeding video: patient.uwhealth.org/gravity-tube-feeding



- UW Health tube feeding education video series: patient.uwhealth.org/education/tube-feeding



- Abbott Nutrition: abbottnutrition.com/nutrition-resources
- Nestle Health Science: nestlehealthscience.us/mytubefeeding/tube-feeding-education
- Oley Foundation: oley.org
- Feeding Matters: https://www.feedingmatters.org/

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2026. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#295.