

Frequently Asked Questions About Feeding Tubes

Why should a feeding tube be placed in my pet?

Feeding tubes allow us to provide pets with nutritional support when they either cannot or will not eat enough to support their nutritional requirements. Feeding tubes also permit us to feed pets the *optimal* diet for their disease(s) if they will not eat it voluntarily. For many diseases, such as kidney disease, an optimal diet can greatly increase survival time as well as quality of life. Additionally, feeding tubes offer a great route for administering some medications and additional water supplementation when necessary.

Can't we just wait to see if my pet will eat soon?

A feeding tube has been recommended because your pet has already had a decreased appetite for at least a few days and is anticipated that he/she will continue to have insufficient food intake. Inadequate nutrition (starvation) can have detrimental effects on many organ systems and increases complications and mortality. Feeding tubes are nice because they provide a "safety net" to have in place if needed.

How are feeding tubes placed?

The two most commonly used tubes for at-home care include esophagostomy tubes (E-tubes) and gastrostomy tubes (G-tubes or PEG-tubes). Both types of tubes are placed under general anesthesia. The E-tube is placed directed into the esophagus while the G-tube is placed directly into the stomach (either surgically or with endoscopic guidance). Both tubes are usually extremely well-tolerated by pets.

What kind of maintenance does a feeding tube require?

Pets are usually fed 3-4 times daily with a feeding tube. Usually the diet will consist of a slurry made up of a specific canned food that has been blended with a specific amount of water. The tube site (where the tube exits the skin) will need to be checked twice daily and some simple bandage care is required.

Can my pet still eat and drink with a feeding tube?

Yes! Your pet will still be able to eat and drink with a feeding tube in place. This means that as he/she begins to eat on his/her own, the amount of food being given via the feeding tube may be decreased accordingly. Once your pet is eating enough to maintain his/her body weight, the feeding tube may be removed (under veterinary supervision).

How long will the tube stay in place?

Tubes are typically left in place until your pet has been eating well for at least one week. If necessary, E-tubes and G-tubes can be maintained for weeks to months with appropriate care.

Please contact The Ohio State University Internal Medicine service with any additional questions.