

HENRY FORD
HEALTH SYSTEM



TUBE
FEEDING

Live Well – Finish Well
ADVANCE CARE PLANNING



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This brochure can help you decide if you want to try tube feeding if you are too sick to swallow normally or take in enough food or water on your own.

WHAT IS IT?

When people have difficulty swallowing or are too sick to eat on their own, a feeding tube provides liquid nutrition. A temporary feeding tube (NG tube) is placed through the nose into the stomach. A PEG tube is placed surgically through the skin and into the stomach or intestines when needed for longer periods of time. Food and water are slowly and gently pumped through these tubes.

For people with a mouth or throat problem who are expected to recover soon, a feeding tube may ease the pain of eating. People with brain or nerve disease, or an injury or disability that causes problems swallowing may also benefit.

For people near the end of life, a feeding tube may not prolong life. Near the end of life, it is natural to lose interest in eating or drinking and to stop digesting food as body functions begin to shut down.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

When the body cannot use the nutrition that a feeding tube provides, the tube may cause:

- bloating, cramping, diarrhea
- nausea and vomiting
- water build up in the legs
- water build up in the lungs, making it difficult to breath.

People with conditions such as late stage dementia may feel anxiety, become agitated, and try to pull the tube out. They may need to have their hands tied down to avoid harming themselves.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

People worry that a patient will “starve” if they do not get a feeding tube. People who stop eating or drinking because they are sick are often dying from a disease. These people die from the disease, not because they are not eating.

Tube feeding may be tried on a trial basis. When the decision is made to place a feeding tube, you can also agree to monitor its continued use. If things don’t go as hoped, you may decide to stop tube feeding.

If you choose not to be tube fed, you will be kept comfortable with small sips of water, ice chips and wetting of your mouth and lips.

If you do not want tube feeding, you should share your wishes with your doctors and family.

