

PEG (Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy) Tube Feeding & Maintenance

Feeding tubes, or PEG tubes (percutaneous endoscopy-placed feeding tubes) as they are more commonly known, are tubes that enter the stomach. They allow food, medication, and water to be given regardless of the animal's appetite or ability to eat and are therefore useful in a wide range of situations.

PEG-tubes can seem daunting initially, but it is important to realize that as long as you stick to a routine, using a PEG-tube is easy. Potential complications are minimal and easy to assess. The animal rarely objects to the PEG tube being used and may find it to be a pleasant experience.

PEG tubes can be left in place for months or more, barring any complications. However, as soon as your pet no longer needs the tube, it can be simply removed without the need for anesthesia or stitches.

What to Feed

The type of diet that is fed through the tube is carefully chosen by your veterinarian, based on the underlying disease of your pet and the type and size of the feeding tube. Some diets can be directly drawn up into a syringe and put through the feeding tube. Other diets (e.g. canned diets) need to be blended with water to reach a certain consistency prior to administration through the feeding tube.

Feeding

1. Pull the appropriate amount of food into a syringe(s) and warm it by placing it in a hot water bath (hot tap water) for approximately 10 minutes. The food and water should be room temperature prior to feeding (you can test it against your arm like you would a baby's bottle of milk).
2. Unscrew or remove the cap from the end of the e-tube.
3. Flush the PEG tube with 5 to 10 ml of warm water before feeding; this is to ensure that that tube is clear.
4. Give all medications as instructed (use only liquid medications – can crush tablets and mix with water or food - or the tube may become blocked), flushing after each with 1 to 5 mls of water.
5. Slowly syringe the food through the feeding tube, over a 5 to 10 minute period (larger amounts may take 15 minutes). If your pet becomes restless, nauseous, or starts licking their lips, stop and give the stomach a moment to relax and then give the food more slowly and check to ensure that the food isn't too hot or cold. If these signs persist, stop feeding, and call your veterinarian for further advice.
6. Before capping the tube, flush an additional 5 to 10 ml (or as instructed above) of warm water through the tube.
7. Feed the recommended amount provided by your veterinarian

Tube Maintenance

Your pet CANNOT remove the PEG tube. This can be an emergency if the PEG tube is removed too quickly (2-3 weeks) after placement. Your pet must wear an e-collar or tube collar at all times to prevent your pet from pulling the tube.

PEG tubes should be evaluated daily at the exit site on the belly. If the area appears red, uncomfortable, has a discharge (blood or thick yellow / green color) or is warm, please call your veterinarian. The area should be cleaned with a moist, clean, damp cloth or gauze once daily, more often if instructed. The bandage or shirt should be changed as needed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can my pet eat or drink normally while they have a feeding tube?

A PEG tube does not prevent normal eating and drinking. Fresh water should be available at all times. You may offer fresh food to your pet daily before a tube feeding session. It may be useful to document any voluntary food or water intake. When your pet appears to be improving, your veterinarian may reduce the amount of tube feeding volume or frequency, to further encourage your pet to eat. Please keep track of the amount consumed because this should be subtracted from the total amount of food needed to be given via the PEG tube.

How frequently will I need to visit the veterinarian?

This will largely depend on your pet's underlying illness. Regardless, we will need to closely monitor your pet for the first few weeks after a feeding tube is placed. This may include physical examinations, body weight monitoring or blood work. Your pet should be weighed every 2 weeks on the same scale, and the body weight should be recorded. You may be able to do this at home by holding your pet in your arms while standing on a scale, and then subtracting your weight from the total.

What should I do if the tube won't flush?

Occasionally the tube can become blocked. This is usually because the food was too thick (i.e. not enough water or insufficiently blended) or because the tube wasn't flushed correctly at the last feeding. Firstly, don't panic. Try pushing water through the tube under higher pressure. Be careful – if too much water shoots into the stomach under high pressure, it may make your pet feel nauseous – but this may be enough to clear the obstruction. If that doesn't work, try filling the tube with a small amount (1-5 mls) of original Coca-Cola, capping the end, and leaving it in place for 10-15 minutes. Coke is often able to 'digest' the obstruction and it will then flush in easily. Do not substitute Coca-cola for other carbonated drinks. If the obstruction still won't clear, just cap the tube and contact your veterinarian. Skipping a single meal is unlikely to be detrimental and your vet may be able to clear the tube.

What should I do if my pet starts vomiting?

Your pet may be vomiting because of its disease, or it may be unable to tolerate the type, quantity, or temperature of food, or the speed of administration. You should contact your veterinarian for specific instructions. In most circumstances, it would be fine to skip a meal while you are contacting your vet. If your pet starts to cough or seems to have respiratory distress either during or just after feeding, please stop any further feeding and contact a veterinarian.

Veterinary Specialty Center is guided by the belief that companion animals deserve state-of-the-art medical care in a kind and comforting environment. The courage of our patients, the loyalty of their human families, and the devotion of our referral veterinarians inspire our vision. It is sustained by the contributions of our compassionate, knowledgeable and dedicated staff and built upon a tradition of providing unsurpassed healthcare for animals.
