SYRINGE OR BOLUS METHOD

DEFINITION:
A feeding tube is a medical device used to provide nutrition to patients who:
• cannot obtain nutrition by mouth
• are unable to swallow safely
• need nutritional supplementation

The process of being fed by a feeding tube is called tube feeding.

Bolus refers to a set dose of a substance. In this case, a set amount of tube feeding formula.

Getting Ready:
1. If your work surface is washable, clean it with soap and water and dry it with a clean towel or paper towel. If your work surface is not washable, wipe it free of dust. Spread a clean towel or paper towels over the surface.
2. Wash your hands with soap and water.
3. Check placement of your feeding tube.
4. Check feeding tube residuals if your nurse, dietitian or doctor told you to do so. Your initial feeding will not require checking for residuals.
5. Shake the formula well. Wipe off the top of the can with a clean, damp paper towel.
6. Always use room temperature feeding formula.

Feeding:
1. Draw approximately 30 mL of water into the syringe. Attach it to the end of the feeding tube. Flush the tube free of stomach contents. Clamp the feeding tube. Remove the syringe.
2. Pour the proper amount of formula into a clean, empty container such as a glass measuring cup.

PARTS OF A SYRINGE:
- Syringe tip
- Plunger
- Top line

Supplies Needed:
- 60 mL (or cc) syringe
- formula
- warm water to flush

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3. Draw formula into the syringe. Attach the tip of the syringe to the feeding tube or adaptor. Make sure the tip of the syringe is firmly inserted into the tube or adaptor. Unclamp the feeding tube.

4. SLOWLY push the plunger down. Clamp the feeding tube between each bolus to prevent leakage. Refill the syringe with formula. Repeat the procedure until the desired amount of formula is given. If you feel full, wait 10 to 15 minutes before you continue the feeding.

5. After the desired amount of formula has been given, flush the feeding tube with approximately 30 mL of water, clamp and detach.

6. Clean, rinse and dry your feeding equipment after each feeding.

7. Stay in an upright position for 30 to 60 minutes after your feeding to prevent stomach upset.

CHECKING THE RESIDUAL:

The residual is the contents left in your stomach since your last feeding. Once you are stable on your goal amount of tube feeding and have no symptoms of excessive fullness, bloating or upset stomach, your health care provider may tell you to stop checking residuals before each feeding. If these symptoms return, check your residual before giving the next feeding.

How to check your residual:

1. Flush tube with 30 mL of water before checking residual.

2. Using a 60 mL syringe, push the plunger all the way in. Insert the syringe into the end of the feeding tube. Unclamp.

3. Gently draw back the plunger to withdraw stomach contents. Clamp.

4. Check the amount of fluid in the syringe. If the entire syringe is filled, put the fluid in a measuring cup. Continue to withdraw stomach contents until no more can be withdrawn. Measure and record the total volume.

5. Unless you were told differently, if the residual measures less than one cup (240 mL), return the residual to your stomach. This fluid contains things your body needs. If the residual is more than 250 mL or if you feel nauseous or full, do not return the residual to your stomach. Wait one hour and recheck the residual. Do not give tube feeding if the residual is still high or if you still feel nauseous or full.

6. Flush tube with 30 mL of water after checking residual. Clamp.

Supplies Needed:

- Large measuring cup
- 60 mL (or cc) syringe
- Warm water to flush

HOW TO STORE YOUR FORMULA:

1. Store all unopened cans or containers of formula in a clean, dry location.
2. Do not store formula on the floor, near the stove, above the refrigerator or in the garage. Store the formula at a temperature of 50 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

3. Check the expiration date on the can before you use it. Discard the can if it is out of date.

4. Store opened, unused formula in the refrigerator. Keep it covered. Throw it away if it is not used in 24 hours.

**CARING FOR YOUR TUBE SITE:**

1. Wash around your tube site at least once daily with soap and water. You may shower with your tube in place. Do not soak in a bathtub or pool.

2. If your tube comes out, report to the nearest VA as soon as possible. A new tube or a temporary tube must be placed in the tract to keep it open. *If your tube comes out, you may go to a non-VA facility to be evaluated. However, VA may not pay for a non-VA appointment or emergency room visit.*

**MOUTH CARE:**

1. Even if you can’t eat, continue good mouth care to prevent infections in your mouth and throat.

2. Brush your teeth, gums and tongue or clean your dentures at least twice a day.

3. Apply moisturizer to your lips.

**All medicines must be approved by VA pharmacy before use.**

**GIVING MEDICINES:**

1. Use liquid medicines whenever possible.

2. Give each medicine separately. Follow with at least 15 mL of water flush.

3. Use a clean glass to mix water with medicines. This also makes it easier to draw medicines into the syringe.

**What to do if a medicine must be crushed:**

1. Crush the medicine into a fine powder with a mortar and pestle or a pill crusher. Then dissolve it in 30 mL or water before putting it through the feeding tube.

2. Draw the medicine into a 60 mL syringe and gently flush it into the feeding tube.

3. Flush the tube with 15 mL of water.

4. Clamp the tube.

**How to give a medicine capsule through a feeding tube:**

1. Open the capsule. Mix the powder from the capsule with 30 mL of warm water.

2. Draw the medicine into a 60 mL syringe. Gently flush into the feeding tube.

3. Flush tube with 15 mL of water.

4. Clamp the tube.

*After last medicine is given, give a final flush with 30 mL of warm water. Clamp the feeding tube. Pull syringe apart and wash with warm, soapy water. Rinse well. Air dry.*
PREVENTING A CLOGGED FEEDING TUBE:

1. Flush your feeding tube with 30 mL of water before and after:
   - feeding
   - medicines
   - checking residuals
2. DO NOT use the following items to unclog your tube. They may make the clog worse.
   - meat tenderizer
   - fruit or vegetable juice
   - colas
   - ginger ale
   - root beer
   - any other sodas or soda pops
3. If your tube clogs, pull out excess water with your syringe. Add 15 mL of warm water. Clamp the tube for 10 minutes. Then flush with 15 mL or warm water. *Call your health care provider if the tube is still clogged.*

GENERAL TIPS AND GUIDELINES

1. Never set up or do the feeding in the bathroom.
2. Remain in an upright position during the feeding and for 30 to 60 minutes after the feeding. Always sit in a chair, propped up in a bed or on a couch in a half-sitting position. You should be sitting at about 30 to 45 degrees (for example, when using two pillows).
3. Store all unopened cans of formula in a clean, dry location. Do not store formula on the floor, near a stove, above the refrigerator or in the garage. Store your formula at a temperature of 50 to 70 degrees.
4. Check the expiration date on the can before using the formula. Discard the can if it is out of date.
5. Store any opened, unused formula in the refrigerator. Keep it covered. Throw it away if not used within 24 hours.
6. Check your tube daily. If you have a skin disk that is not sutured in place, gently rotate the feeding tube daily by 360 degrees. Call your health care provider if the tube has moved more than one inch from where it comes out of your abdomen.
7. Do not add medicine, juices or any other substances to the tube feeding formula.
WHEN TO CALL YOUR PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN OR HOME CARE NURSE:

1. Your feeding tube comes out and is no longer in place.
2. Anything makes you stop tube feedings for more than 24 hours.
3. A weight loss or gain of more than two to three pounds over two to three days.
4. A feeling of choking, coughing or difficulty breathing.
5. Swelling, redness or draining from the feeding tube site.
6. Nausea, vomiting or heartburn that lasts for more than 24 hours.
7. Diarrhea (more than three loose stools a day for more than two days)
8. Constipation that lasts for more than three days.
9. Blood in or around your feeding tube.
10. Signs of dehydration:
   • fever
   • thirst
   • decreased urine output
   • mouth dryness

CONTACT NUMBERS:

Primary Care Physician:

Outpatient Pharmacy: (850) 912-2110
(formula and medicines)

Clinical Dietitian: (850) 912-2083
(unintentional weight changes and feeding intolerances)

Endoscopy Minor Procedure Unit:
(850) 912-2345
(tube loss or damage)

Nurse: (850) 912-2303

ORDERING SUPPLIES:

1. After your discharge, order refills for tube feeding and tube feeding supplies from the VA pharmacy.
2. Your tube feeding product(s) should arrive by mail in seven to ten days after ordering.

Formula Name:

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Goal:

_______ cans or containers per day
Give _________ cans or containers _________ times each day.

Additional water flush goal per day:

_______ mL
Give _________ mL of water before and after each feeding and _________ mL between feedings _________ times each day.

Additional Instructions:

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References:
Photos: Medical Media Service/Tom Coffelt

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