

# A Guide to Gastrostomy Tubes

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics  
Allied Health Professions

## What is a Gastrostomy Tube?

- A gastrostomy tube is a feeding tube which is inserted into your stomach by a doctor through a small opening in your abdomen.
- This is called a STOMA
- The gastrostomy tube enables you to receive nutrition, fluid and medication directly into your stomach
- You may also hear a gastrostomy tube being referred to as a 'PEG' or 'PRG'. These medical abbreviations refer to how the tube is inserted

## Why do I need gastrostomy tube?

Your Doctor has recommended that you have a gastrostomy tube to help improve your nutrition. You may not have been receiving enough nutrition because:

- You cannot eat enough to maintain your health
- You have been having swallowing difficulties
- You may be recovering from surgery, chemotherapy or radiation therapy

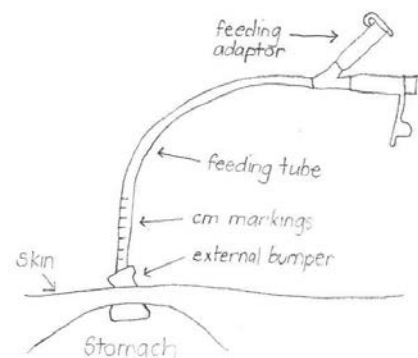
A gastrostomy tube can be permanent or temporary. There are different types of tubes that can be inserted depending on your needs. These are:

- Original gastrostomy tube
- Balloon replacement tube
- Low profile device

## What is an Original Gastrostomy tube?

This is the first tube you will have inserted into your stomach. The tube has an internal bumper that sits inside your stomach and a bumper or stitches against your skin on the outside to help keep the tube in place.

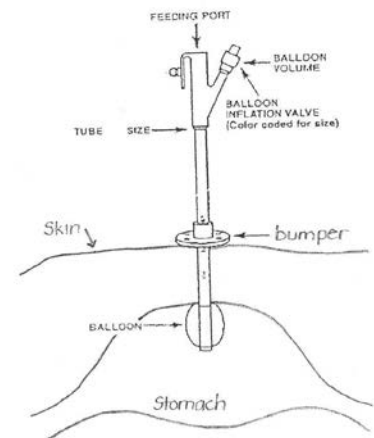
Your tube may look different from the picture depending on which company made the tube, and how the tube was inserted.



## What is a Balloon Replacement tube?

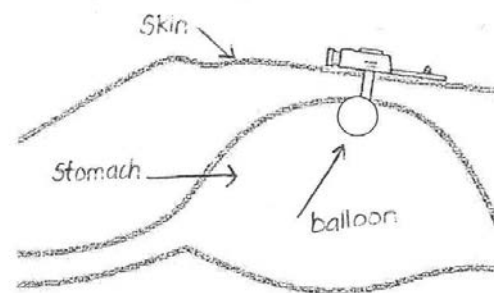
This type of tube looks similar to the original gastrostomy tube but inside your stomach it has a balloon filled with water to keep it in place.

These tubes are usually inserted when the original tube needs replacing however they can sometimes be inserted in surgery as your first tube.



## What is a Low Profile Device? (Button)

- These tubes sit flat against the abdominal wall, so are easier to conceal under clothing.
- They are only inserted when the original tube needs to be replaced.
- You can discuss with the nurse which is the best low profile device for your needs.



## How is a Gastrostomy tube inserted?

If you are in hospital you will be told of the date of the procedure. If you are an outpatient, you will be contacted by phone or letter with the details of your appointment.

Most outpatients will be admitted to hospital on the day of the procedure, and will have an overnight stay in hospital for monitoring

Tubes can be inserted by either:

- Using an endoscope in the Gastroenterology Department
- Using X-ray in the Medical Imaging Department
- During surgery

### Endoscopy

You will be given some sedation to make you sleepy. A flexible tube with a small camera and light on the end is inserted into your stomach through your mouth. The doctor can then examine your stomach and find a suitable area to place the tube. A cut is then made in your skin on your abdomen and the feeding tube is inserted.

### Medical Imaging (X-ray)

You will be given some sedation to make you sleepy. A small tube is placed through your nose and into your stomach. Air is pushed through the tube to inflate your stomach. A small cut is made in the skin and the tube placed in your stomach under the guidance of x-ray.

### **Surgery**

Occasionally some tubes are placed by surgeons. If you are having a procedure in theatre and you need a gastrostomy tube, it will be done at the same time as your operation

### **What are the risks involved with insertion of a Gastrostomy?**

There are risks involved with all medical procedures including the insertion of a Gastrostomy tube. These include-

- Infection at the stoma site which may require antibiotics
- Bleeding around the tube
- Chest infection, which can be caused by vomit going into the lungs
- Your procedure may not be able to be finished due to problems inside your body due to technical problems
- A tear through the wall of the oesophagus (food pipe), stomach or small bowel
- Reaction to the sedation and complications from heart and lung diseases

If you do not understand any of these risks, it is important that you discuss any concerns with your doctor. The doctor will explain these risks to you and will ask you to sign a consent form. When you sign the consent form, it indicates that you understand the procedure and the risks involved

### **What do I need to do before the Gastrostomy is inserted?**

Your doctors and nurses will advise you of any preparation required prior to the procedures. This may include:

- Having your medications reviewed – especially medications for diabetes & anticoagulation
- Discussing any other medical conditions that you have – especially diabetes, heart disease, or a pacemaker
- Explaining how long to fast for the procedure – this depends on how your tube is being inserted, but generally you should not eat or drink anything 6 hours before the procedure
- In most circumstances, you will be given intravenous antibiotics on the day of the procedure to minimise the risk of infection at the stoma.

### **What should I expect after the tube is inserted?**

You will need to stay in hospital until you have been trained how to use & care for your gastrostomy tube.

It is normal to have some discomfort once the local anaesthetic wears off. This can last a few days. Your nurse can provide you with some pain relief that the doctor has prescribed for you. Panadol is usually sufficient but you may have Panadeine if the pain does not ease.

If you are not able to swallow tablets the pharmacist may change some of your medications to liquid or soluble form so they are easier to put down the tube.

Depending on how your tube was inserted, you may not be allowed to have anything to eat or drink OR be fed by the tube for up to 24 hours. This is so the tube can be reviewed by your doctor to ensure it is in the correct position & safe to use.

### **How often does the tube need replacing?**

This depends on the type of tube you had inserted, and how it is maintained. Most initial gastrostomy tubes last up to 12 months.

As you get to know your tube you will start to know when it requires changing.

### **Where do I get the tube replaced?**

#### Original Gastrostomy tube

Your first tube change will always be replaced the unit that inserted the tube. A nurse or doctor will decide which tube is best for you and replace it. It only takes about 15 mins to replace but you may have to wait at the hospital so expect to be longer.

#### Balloon Replacement tube

This tube can be replaced by the nurse in the Gastroenterology unit or by a nurse in the community. Some companies have a special nurse who will come and replace your tube at home.

#### Low Profile Device (Button)

These can be changed by a nurse in the community, a Gastroenterology nurse or a relative or carer who has been shown how to change the button and feels confident to do so.

Contact your dietitian or local gastroenterology department if you have further questions:

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Acknowledgements**

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