

Helping your child eat while on a tube feed

This handout will help:

- You learn how to help your child continue to eat and drink orally (by mouth) throughout tube feeding.
- Your child to get off of his or her tube feeding.



Your child may need time to get used to eating again.

Health team members to help while on tube feeds:

The Registered Dietitian (RD):

- Decides how much formula and plans the feeding schedule.
- Helps you make healthy food choices following Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide.

The Occupational Therapist (OT):

- Helps with what food textures are best if your child is having difficulty eating or drinking.
-

Common challenges

Introducing food during or after tube feeding will be different for each child. Some challenges might be:

- selective or picky eating
- refusing or turning away from food that is offered
- not liking the sight or smell of food
- taste changes from treatment
- developing a strong dislike for a food from a bad experience (called a learned aversion)
- gagging or vomiting
- not wanting to eat or drink
- not knowing how to eat or drink orally
- having trouble sucking or chewing

Caregivers may also have stress or anxiety.

Tips at meal times

- The caregiver determines **what, where and when to eat.**
- The child determines **whether and how much to eat.**



Tips at meal times (continued)

What:

- Offer a variety of foods (3 to 4 items) at a meal with different textures, flavours and colours. Make sure there is at least one type of food your child will eat.
- Provide the same foods for the whole family. Do not make a different meal for your child.

When:

- Have regular meal times and snacks to help your child develop healthy eating habits.
- Pick a time of day when your child is in a good mood and open to trying foods.
- Try new foods often. It may take 10 to 15 times before a new food is accepted.
- Limit meal times to 20 minutes.

Where:

- Eat meals and snacks at the family table without electronics, toys, books or other distractions.
- Be relaxed and make eating fun.

Be consistent so that everyone who feeds your child at meal times uses the same approach.

Make meal time social:

Meal times with family and friends will help to increase your child's interest in eating:



- Include all children as part of the family meal, even though your child may not eat a full meal. Being with the family while eating a meal allows you and other family members to be a role model.
- Make meal times more than just about eating. Make it a time to talk about the day, talk about the smells and look of food, or talk about food memories.
- If your child is getting **bolus feeds**, then run the tube feeds during meal time so your child is getting their nutrition with the family.
- If your child is getting **overnight feeds**, then continue to involve your child at meal time. Watching other family members eat can help your child learn eating skills. This helps prepare your child to eat orally.

Make meal time fun:

- Involve your child in making meals and grocery shopping to help increase their interest in eating.
- Let your child feed him or herself. Playing and interacting with food can help to increase interest in eating again.
- Help your toddler explore finger foods or dip fingers into foods to provide new taste experiences in a play-like environment.
- Making meal time a good experience will encourage your child to eat foods with the family.

These tips can be used both in the hospital and at home.

Improving eating and drinking

Introducing food can be a slow process that takes a lot of practice.

Try doing MORE of....	And LESS of....
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Using small plates with small portions, so your child can feel successful when finishing a meal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on the amount of food or the number of attempts • Overwhelming him or her with large amounts of foods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Respecting your child's appetite ✓ Giving small portions gives your child the opportunity to ask for more themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forcing your child to eat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Serving new foods along with your child's favourite foods. ✓ Making small changes to favourite meals. For example: when making grilled cheese, change the type of bread or change the type of cheese, but not both at once. ✓ Presenting the new food. It can take 10 to 15 tries before a child will accept a new food! ✓ Putting healthy foods into recipes (such as adding vegetables into sauces) can get your child used to new flavours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelming with new foods

Try doing MORE of....	And LESS of....
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Keeping your child at the table for under 20 minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making meal times long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Having regular meals and snack times. This will allow your child to get hungry in between meals. ✓ Giving drinks after meals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving your child food and drinks all day long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Getting your child used to having scheduled meal/snack times. If your child does not eat enough at a meal, they need to wait until the next snack or meal time if they are still hungry. ✓ Offering the same foods for the entire family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving attention to your child when he or she refuses food • Giving in to requests for favourite foods shortly after dinner because they didn't eat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Offering bland foods (such as crackers, toast, rice or arrowroot cookies) when your child is feeling unwell. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering favourite foods when your child is feeling unwell – this may cause a learned aversion or dislike to their favourite foods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Choosing non-food items as a reward for good behaviours, such as free play, story time, stickers, or screen time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using food as a reward, or taking away favourite food(s) as a punishment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Eating in a room with no distractions such as electronics or toys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letting your child get distracted with electronics

How to go from tube feeding to eating

If your child is getting all their nutrition from tube feeds, they may not have an interest in eating or have much of an appetite.

When your child is ready to eat food, it is important to decrease the amount of tube feed formula to give them a chance to feel hungry. The RD can help you reduce the amount of tube feed or number of feeds, which can increase appetite.

Working with your RD to decrease or stop the tube feed

Some ideas include:

- Keep daily food records to help the RD make changes.
- Keep track of your child's weight and use the same scale each time. Expect some weight loss at first.
- If overnight feeds:
 - start or stop feeds 1 to 2 hours earlier, or
 - decrease rate of feed.
- If on bolus feeds:
 - allow your child to try to eat the meal or snack before giving the bolus feed
 - your RD can help decide the right amount to give based on how your child eats.
- When your child is able to eat most of their nutrition needs, you can discuss stopping the tube feeds with your RD.

Continue to work with the RD and OT when reducing tube feeds and switching to regular food. A feeding tube may still be needed to give fluids and medications even once they are eating regular foods.

The health care team members will let you know once the tube can be taken out.

Other resources

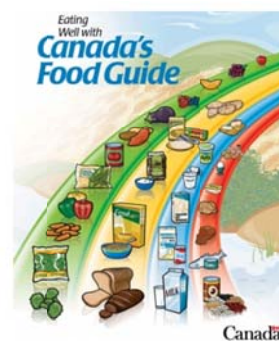
Visit the Hamilton Health Sciences Patient Education Library at www.hhsc.ca/pedl and search for these handouts:

- Still a Picky Eater?
- Tips for Texture-Sensitive Kids
- Healthy Eating and Active Living

Go to Ellyn Satter Institute www.ellynsatterinstitute.org

Get a copy of Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide at (www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

Oley Foundation – www.oley.org Click orange button on the left side “HEN (Tube Feeding) Adults and Children



Notes

