

Care of the Esophagostomy Tube

Many people are intimidated by the idea of feeding a pet through an artificial tube but the fact is the esophagostomy or “E” tube makes feeding the sickly pet easy and free of mess. If you have been dealing with oral syringe feeding, meatball feeding or even nasal tubes, the E tube should be a breeze. Feeding through the tube is comfortable for the pet plus the presence of the tube in no way precludes natural eating should the pet wish to do so. As your pet begins to feel better, regular eating can readily take place without disturbing the E tube. The E tube can be in place as a temporary support measure or can be used long term as an indefinite support measure. As you get used to using the tube, feeding will come to be a simple process and part of your regular pet routine.



TO FEED YOUR PET:

Have everything ready before beginning. You will need:

- A syringe full of the liquid food in the appropriate amount. Be sure the food is free of any chunks that could clog the tube. Using a strainer is helpful and using some kind of a blender is a must unless you are using a commercial liquid diet that is already smooth. The diet should be warmed but not hot. Do not microwave the diet or you may get hot spots that are too hot. To warm the food, microwave/heat a tall glass of water and insert the syringe of food in the warm water and let it sit until the food is at least room temperature, and ideally close to body temperature.
- A small glass or cup of tepid (lukewarm) water.
- Any medication you should be giving at this time.

Clear the tube by squirting 6 cc of tepid water through it to be sure it is not clogged. Next hook up the food syringe and slowly deliver the food to the patient. It is tempting to just blast it all in there but, for patient comfort, try to take several minutes or so and take your time. Follow the food with a chaser of 6cc of tepid water to clear the tube. Give any oral medications that is scheduled. Liquid medication can be given through the tube as long as the tube is cleared with 6cc of tepid water before and after each administration. Do not put pills in the tube as the tube could clog. Pills can be crushed and administered through the tube only if they are well dissolved in liquid. Any caking of pill powder has potential to clog the tube so be sure to flush the tube with tepid water after administration.

You will need to clean the stoma (the opening of the skin where the tube enters) daily with a baby wipe or moist tissue. Discharge and/or crusting will accumulate there otherwise. Periodically the wraps will need changing. A special collar (see link below) may be helpful in keeping the tube neat and comfortable.

BE SURE TO ALLOW TIME FOR DIGESTION BETWEEN FEEDINGS.

How much time depends on your pet's feeding plan.

Be sure you understand the amount each feeding and the feeding schedule provided by your veterinarian.

HAVING PROBLEMS?

Esophagostomy tubes can stay in place for months without needing to be replaced. Hopefully your pet's condition will have resolved before that time. When the time comes, the tube's anchoring sutures can be snipped and the tube pulled out. The hole left behind will simply heal on its own. If you have any questions about the tube or its care, your regular veterinarian will be happy to assist you.

Vomiting

- Are you giving the food too quickly? Rapid distension of the stomach is a stimulus to vomit. Try going slower.
- Is the food too cold? Try warming the food to body temperature (around 100° F). Use a thermometer in the warming water bath to be sure the temperature is where you want it.
- If these two solutions do not work, the tube may have slipped too low inside the esophagus. If the tube is dipping into the stomach, the patient may vomit. The doctor can take an x-ray to see if this is the case and easily reposition the tube.
- If none of these things seem to be happening, the patient's primary disease may be progressing. Your veterinarian will need to evaluate your pet more comprehensively.

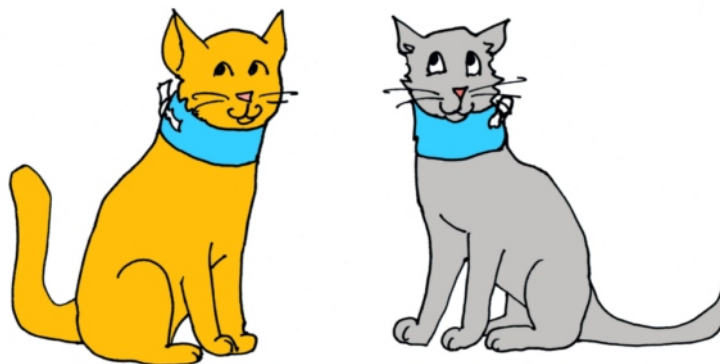
Tube clogged?

- Clogging of the tube can be a challenge. First try to force 6 cc or so of tepid water through the tube by pushing. If the clog does not give way, try hooking up a syringe of 6 cc or so of water and alternately push and pull back creating a "toilet plunger" effect. Continue fairly rapid push-pull action until the tube is cleared.
- Note: some people feel that incubating 6 cc of coca-cola in the tube overnight is helpful in dissolving a clog. Whether or not this works remains of some controversy but may be worth a try as the tube will be useless if it cannot be unclogged.

Crusting or Pus at the tube exit site?

- The patient's body does not like having a foreign body sticking out of it and some inflammation is frequently associated with the exit hole. True infection is unusual and most of the time simply cleaning the area with gauze or a moist tissue is sufficient to solve the problem.

Esophagostomy tubes can stay in place for months without needing to be replaced. Hopefully your pet's condition will have resolved before that time. When the time comes, the tube's anchoring sutures can be snipped and the tube pulled out. The hole left behind will simply heal on its own. If you have any questions about the tube or its care, your regular veterinarian will be happy to assist you.



HELPFUL LINKS

This web site sells special E tube wraps for both dogs and cats which include a velcro strap to hold the tube out of the way. Additional tube care information is also provided.

www.KittyKollar.com

A Couple of Instructional Videos on Feeding with the E Tube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDclKxg_wk8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NC1HehR-g8>

Amount to feed your pet each feeding: _____

Hours between feedings: _____

How many times a day to feed: _____

Last revised: 5/27/2022



Mar Vista Animal Medical Center

3850 Grand View Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90066 • (310) 391-6741 • Fax: (310) 391-6744

Information on additional pet care topics can be found on our world wide web site:

<http://www.marvistavet.com>