

Considering a gastrostomy tube?

This document explains what a gastrostomy tube is and things to consider when deciding if it is right for you.

What is a gastrostomy tube?

A gastrostomy tube is a feeding tube into your stomach. It allows delivery of liquid nutrition, fluids and medications into your stomach. You may also hear a gastrostomy tube called a 'PEG', 'RIG' or 'PRG'. These medical terms refer to how the tube is inserted.

Why do I need a gastrostomy tube?

Your doctor has recommended you consider a gastrostomy tube. You may not have been receiving enough nutrition because:

- You cannot eat and drink enough to maintain your health
- You have swallowing difficulties

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

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

What is an initial gastrostomy tube?

- The initial tube will be inserted via your mouth into your stomach using a camera (endoscopy).

The tube has two bumpers (small rubber disc) to hold it in place. One sits inside your stomach and one sits outside of the skin that you can see. This is an example of a gastrostomy tube.

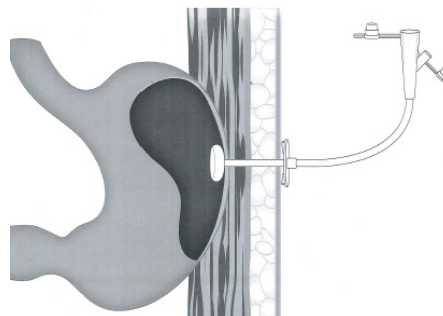


Image: Claire Blake

What is a balloon replacement tube?

- The initial tube will need replacing after around 12 months.
- A balloon replacement tube is like the initial gastrostomy tube. Instead of a rubber disc (bumper) it has a balloon filled with water to keep it in place.

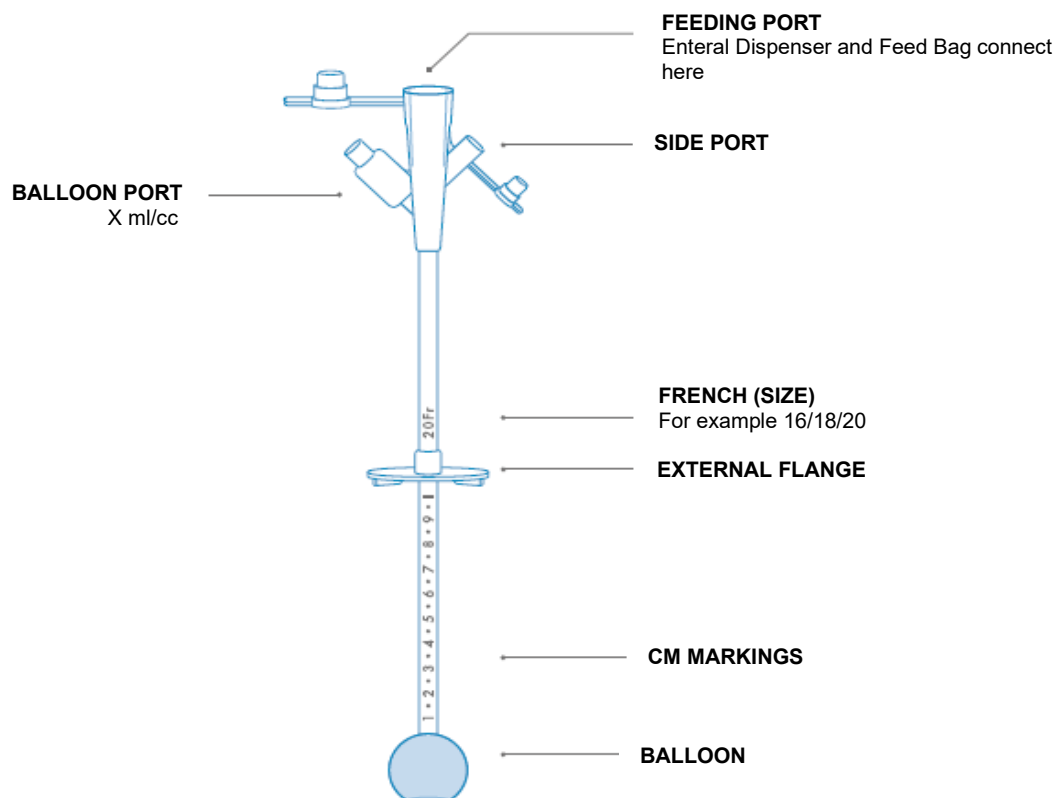


Image: Claire Blake

What is a low profile device (button)?

- These tubes sit flat against the skin and are easier to conceal under clothing.
- They can be inserted when the original tube needs replacing.
- Low profile devices are not appropriate for all people. You can discuss with your doctor whether this type of device is right for you.

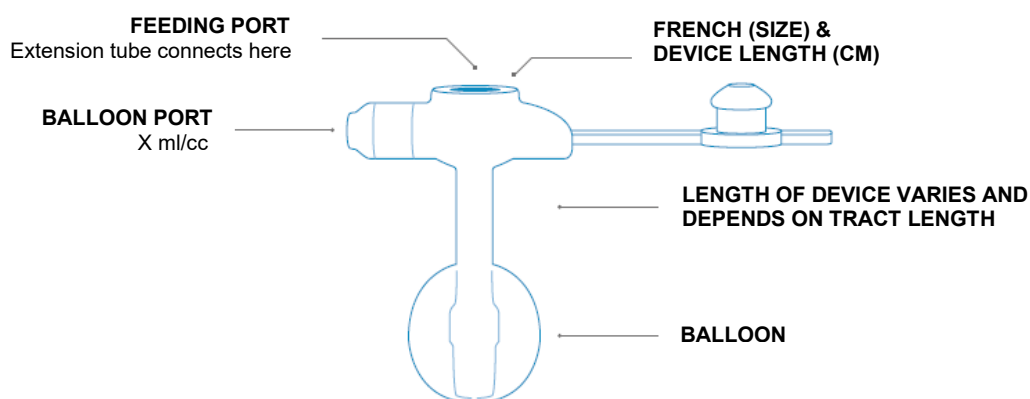


Image: Claire Blake

How is a gastrostomy tube inserted?

The hospital will tell you the date of the procedure. You will be admitted to hospital the day before or the day of the procedure. You will stay overnight in hospital post-procedure for monitoring. Gastrostomy tubes are inserted by either:

- Using an endoscope
- Using x-ray to guide the insertion
- During surgery

Your doctor will choose the most suitable method for you.

Endoscopy

You will receive 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 will examine your stomach and find a suitable area to place the tube. A cut will be made into your stomach for the feeding tube to be inserted.

Medical Imaging (X-ray)

You will receive some sedation to make you sleepy. A small tube will be inserted through your nose and into your stomach. Air is pushed through the tube to inflate your stomach. A cut will be made into your stomach and the feeding tube inserted using an X-ray to guide the placement.

Surgery

Gastrostomy tubes can be placed by surgeons. If you have 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?

The insertion of a gastrostomy tube has risks involved, similar to all medical procedures. Your doctor will explain these risks to you and will ask you to sign a consent form. If you do not understand any of these risks, it is important that you discuss these with your doctor. The risks involved could include:

- Infection or bleeding at the gastrostomy site
- Chest infection caused by fluid going into the lungs (aspiration)
- A tear in the oesophagus (food pipe), stomach or small bowel
- A reaction to sedation

What will happen before the gastrostomy is inserted?

Your doctors and nurses will tell you any instructions or preparation required before the procedure. This may include:

- Having your medications reviewed by a pharmacist
- Discussing any previous surgeries or other medical conditions that you have
- You should not eat or drink anything (fast) before the procedure. Your doctors will tell you how long you will need to fast for.
- You may receive antibiotics at the time of procedure to minimise the risk of infection at the gastrostomy site.

What should I expect after the tube is inserted?

You will receive training on how to use and care for your gastrostomy tube while you are in hospital. It is normal to have some discomfort or pain for a few days after your procedure. You will receive pain relief if required. The pharmacist may change some of your medications to liquid form so that they can be put down the tube. The doctor will check the gastrostomy tube is in the correct position and safe to use before you can use it.

How do I use the tube?

The dietitian will recommend the most appropriate way of feeding into the tube. This could be using a pump or syringe. The dietitian will tell you the most suitable type of liquid feed or supplement that meets your nutritional needs. A plan for ongoing support, feeds and equipment will be provided while you are in hospital.

How often does the tube need replacing?

Gastrostomy tubes vary in the length of time to replacement. Most original gastrostomy tubes last up to 12 months and balloon tubes last up to 6 months.

Where do I get the tube replaced?

- Your doctor or dietitian will organise your gastrostomy tube replacement. If any complications arise before this, see your GP or present to an emergency department.

For further information or any concerns, contact your dietitian or gastroenterology department: