

Enteral Nutrition—An Overview

What is Enteral Nutrition?

All people need food to live. Sometimes a person cannot eat any or enough food because of an illness. Others may have a decreased appetite, difficulties in swallowing, or some type of surgery that interferes with eating. When this occurs, and one is unable to eat, nutrition must be supplied in a different way. One method is “enteral nutrition” often called “tube feeding.”

Normal digestion occurs when food is broken down in the stomach and bowel, then absorbed in the bowel. The blood carries these absorbed products to all parts of the body. Tube feeding is when a special liquid food formula containing protein, carbohydrates (sugar), fats, vitamins and minerals, is given through a tube into the stomach or small bowel.

Who Receives Tube Feeding?

People of all ages receive tube feeding. It may be given to infants and children, as well as to adults. People can live well on tube feeding for as long as it is needed. Tube feeding can be used for a short time, and then the tube is removed when the person can begin to eat normally again.

How is Tube Feeding Supplied?

Tube feeding can be given through different types of tubes. One type of tube can be placed through the nose into the stomach or small bowel. This tube is called a nasogastric or nasoenteral feeding tube. Sometimes the tube is placed directly through the skin into the stomach or small bowel. This is called a gastrostomy or jejunostomy.

A patient’s healthcare team (doctors, nurses, dietitians, and pharmacists) talks with them about the different types of feeding tubes.

How Many People in the U.S. Receive Tube Feeding?

Many hospitalized patients in the U.S. receive tube feeding. According to the National Center for Health Statistics latest available statistics, patients received tube feeding in approximately 245,000 hospital stays. About 15% of those were for children and newborns. Individuals can also receive this therapy at home and according to a year 2000 NCHS Home Survey, 30,700 patients were on Home EN. Patients in long-term care facilities also receive tube feeding but statistics on the number of patients receiving tube feeding are not available.

For more information and updates on this topic, contact Peggi Guenter, PhD, RN Senior Director for A.S.P.E.N. at peggig@aspen.nutr.org.

References:

1. A.S.P.E.N. Enteral Nutrition Practice Recommendations. Robin Bankhead, Joseph Boullata, Susan Brantley, Mark Corkins, Peggi Guenter, Joseph Krenitsky, Beth Lyman, Norma A. Metheny, Charles Mueller, Sandra Robbins, Jacqueline Wessel and the A.S.P.E.N. Board of Directors. *JPEN J Parenter Enteral Nutr* 2009; 33: 122-167.
2. AHRQ Healthcare Costs and Utilization Project (HCUP) Nationwide Inpatient Sample (NIS) 2009 data. <http://hcup.ahrq.gov/>

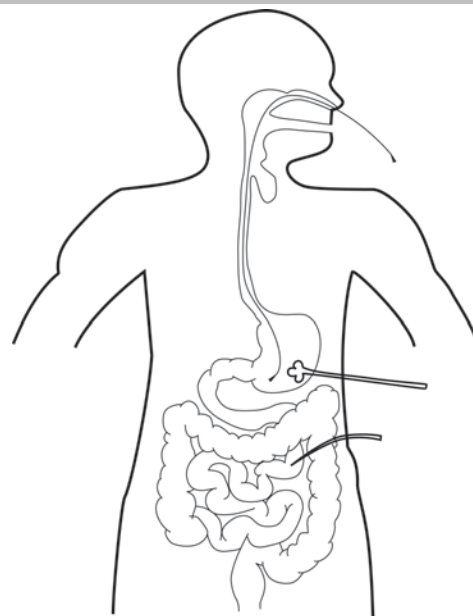


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