

## FAQ: Feeding Tubes and Hospitalized Pets

We recommend that your pet have a feeding tube placed, because s/he has a medical problem that has led to a condition of inadequate nutrition – the beginnings of starvation. It has been well established in human medical circles that inadequate nutrition increases complications and mortality. On the other hand, when the treatment plan includes nutritional therapy, medical outcomes are improved.

*Q: Why can't I just feed my pet by syringe?*

A: There are 3 big reasons not to syringe feed, also known as force feeding. The first is that it's difficult to supply all needed nutrients this way. Most syringeable food contain about 1 calorie/mL. You would have to get an entire cup of food down a cat daily – this means, using a 10 cc syringe, that you would have to force 24 syringes in daily. On the other hand, a 60 lb dog requires about 1200 kcal daily, which is 40 oz or 5 cups daily. Using a 60 cc syringe, you would need to administer 20 syringes a day. This is very tiring to the hands! The second reason is that it's unkind. How would you like to be force fed if you already felt bad? The last reason is that force feeding by syringe will cause development of food aversions. If you have ever had food poisoning, you'll understand how much you would want to avoid any food that you associate with feeling ill.

*Q. Can't we just wait to see if s/he will eat soon?*

A: We are recommending tube feeding because your pet has already refused food for a few days, or because we predict they will refuse food based on our previous experience. Nutrition is part of the treatment plan, and without it your pet will be sicker for longer, delaying normal eating behavior. This is starvation, and it has detrimental effects on the body of a sick pet – the gastrointestinal tract begins to malfunction, making overwhelming systemic infections more likely, while at the same time, the immune system becomes suppressed, making the pet less able to fight infection. The result is often sepsis and death. Nutrition therapy helps to prevent this life-threatening complication!

*Q. Will the tube be painful?*

A: We prefer esophagostomy tubes or gastrostomy tubes because they do not cause discomfort and because you can feed normal foods, reducing the likelihood of diarrhea. These tubes should be placed under anesthesia and it is best to do so when they are under anesthesia for the initial procedure, so an additional anesthetic episode is not necessary. Nasogastric tubes are traditionally placed without anesthesia, however, humans say that they are painful, and we are forced to use liquid diets, that may cause diarrhea.

*Q: Will the tube be difficult to manage?*

A: Most people find feeding tubes easy to handle; in fact, administering medications is even easier since most can be crushed and put into the tube along with food and water!

*Q: Will my pet have to live with this tube forever?*

A: Except in very rare circumstances, such as hospice, the answer is no. Our goal is to support your pet until he or she eats on her own. The tube comes out as soon as they are eating normally, usually within a few weeks.