

Your Care at Home: G-tube

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Narrator

You've had serious trouble swallowing and couldn't get enough food or liquids by mouth. That's why your healthcare professional recommended a gastrostomy or feeding tube, commonly called a G-tube. It supplies nutrients directly into your stomach through your abdomen. So now that you're going home from the hospital, what should you expect?

In the next few minutes, we're going to show you some best practices for caring for your G-tube. Now, as with any medical procedure, your healthcare provider may have specific instructions that he or she may want you to follow. Be sure to listen to their advice.

First and foremost, don't leave the hospital until all of your questions about G-tubes are answered for you and your family. A nurse or licensed care provider at the hospital should teach you exactly how to care for the G-tube, and let you demonstrate to them what you've learned. Take advantage of this. It will give you greater peace of mind as you go home.

Keeping the site of your g-tube clean and dry is critical, so regular cleaning has to be part of your daily routine. First, gather the supplies you'll need:

- Water
- Soap, unless your healthcare professional recommends against it due to possible skin irritation
- Q-tips
- Gauze
- Clean wash cloths and towels, and
- If recommended, dressing for around the site

Start by thoroughly washing and drying your hands. If a dressing is being used around your G- tube remove it. Always inspect the site for any signs of infection. More on that later. Now, clean the skin around the G-tube with soap and warm water. While gently holding the tube, lift the sleeve as far as needed to clean beneath it.

Use a Q-tip for hard-to-reach areas. The key here is "gentle", you don't want to pull too hard or you could damage the inside of your stomach. After cleaning, again gently hold the tube and replace the sleeve so it fits snugly against the abdomen. Clean the tube with soap and water also.

Next, rinse off the skin using a clean wash cloth. Dry the area thoroughly with a clean towel or Q-tip. If a dressing is used, apply a clean, dry one as recommended by your healthcare professional. Speaking of the healthcare professional, call him or her if the g-tube comes out or you notice any signs of infection: if it's red, sore, swollen, or there is any pus or excess drainage coming from or around the tube. If your tube comes out, clean the area and place gauze or a pad over it. Clean and save the tube to take to your healthcare provider. They will be able to tell you when and where to go for reinsertion.

Regular irrigation of your g-tube should also be part of your daily routine, to prevent blockages. At the end of each feeding, add fresh water to the syringe and flush the tube to keep it running clean. Consult your healthcare professional about the amount of water you should use for this irrigation procedure. When it comes to showering or bathing, follow your healthcare professional's suggestions. For the first 4 to 6 weeks after you are home, he or she may want you to avoid baths or to shower with your back to the water. Proper care of your G-tube will keep it functioning smoothly so that you may not need it to be replaced for several months, based on the manufacturer's recommendations. This is generally done in a clinic setting.