



UVA Nutrition Services

**UVA Digestive
Health Center**

What is a Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy (PEG) Tube?

A PEG is a feeding tube placed through the skin, into the stomach. It is often done as an outpatient procedure. A "PEG" is a gastrostomy (a surgical opening into the stomach) made percutaneously (through the skin) using an endoscope (a flexible, lighted instrument). The endoscope is used to determine where to place the feeding tube in the stomach wall. Your nutritionist or doctor may have a picture, diagram, or a sample PEG tube on hand to show you.

What is the tube used for?

A PEG tube is used by people who have trouble getting food from their mouth into their stomach for any reason. It can also be used if you are unable to eat enough to remain well nourished and hydrated. The feeding tube simply provides access into your stomach so that food and liquids do not have to go through your mouth and down your esophagus. It can also be used for medications. Digestion and absorption continue to work just the same as if you had eaten the food. A PEG tube does not prevent someone from eating food; any food eaten will still travel from the mouth down into the stomach, and some people are allowed to continue eating after tube placement.

When might it be time to consider a PEG tube:

- 1) It takes too long to eat a meal and it's not fun any more.
- 2) You are coughing and choking while eating or drinking such that you or your caretakers become anxious.
- 3) Pills are too hard to swallow...literally! (Some people choose a PEG tube initially just to help with taking all their medications).
- 4) Your respiratory status has been declining and your ALS team is concerned that a delay in tube placement could make the procedure too difficult in the future.
- 5) Unhealthy, unintentional weight loss that alters your strength.

How do I get a PEG tube?

If you decide to get a PEG tube placed, your physician will need to refer you for the procedure. At the University of Virginia Health System Digestive Health Center of Excellence, a physician's assistant (PA), who has extensive experience with feeding tubes, will review your medical history and obtain pulmonary functions tests from your respiratory therapist or pulmonologist. For safety reasons, you may be required to meet with the anesthesiologist before the procedure. In addition, a nutritionist will develop an appropriate nutrition care plan for use after the tube is placed. Once everything is in order, a date will be set for both the PEG tube placement and a 7-10 day post-PEG check-up will be scheduled. The follow-up appointment will be with the PA and nutritionist to make sure the tube is working well, your nutrition plan is working, and to answer any questions you may have.

What will happen during the tube placement?

- A doctor will explain the benefits and any risks of the procedure and ask you to sign a consent form.
- You will have an IV placed in your arm for the medications that make you slightly drowsy as well as any other medications or fluids necessary during the procedure.
- With an endoscope, the PEG tube will be placed through your mouth, esophagus and into your stomach. A small cut will be made in your skin over your stomach and the PEG tube will be inserted.
- The procedure itself takes about 15 minutes; however, you will need to plan on being in the endoscopy area for 4 hours or so.
- Bring a list of current medications and any medication allergies you have.
- You must have someone with you to drive you home. You will not be able to drive the rest of the day since you will be given sedation.

What happens after PEG placement?

- You will be given instructions by the nurse in endoscopy about how to care for your PEG tube site.
- A bandage will be placed over the tube site.
- You may feel some soreness at the tube site for 2-3 days.
- You may start to use the tube 3 hours after it was placed.
- If you are allowed to eat food, you may resume eating at the same time you can start using your tube (3 hours) after tube placement unless specified otherwise by your doctor.
- You may shower 24 hours after tube placement.