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Feeding tube - infants

A feeding tube is a small, soft, plastic tube placed through the nose (NG) or mouth (OG) into the stomach. These tubes are used to provide feedings and medicines into the stomach until the baby can take food by mouth.

WHY IS A FEEDING TUBE USED?

Feeding from the breast or bottle requires strength and coordination. Sick or premature babies may not be able to suck or swallow well enough to bottle or breastfeed. Tube feedings allow the baby to get some or all of their feeding into the stomach. This is the most efficient and safest way to provide good nutrition. Oral medicines can also be given through the tube.

HOW IS A FEEDING TUBE PLACED?

A feeding tube is gently placed through the nose or mouth into the stomach. An x-ray can confirm correct placement. In babies with feeding problems, the tip of the tube may be placed past the stomach into the small intestine. This provides slower, continuous feedings.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF A FEEDING TUBE?

Feeding tubes are generally very safe and effective. However, problems may occur, even when the tube is placed properly. These include:

- Irritation of the nose, mouth, or stomach, causing minor bleeding
- Stuffy nose or infection of the nose if the tube is placed through the nose

If the tube is misplaced and not in the proper position, the baby may have problems with:

- An abnormally slow heart rate (bradycardia)
- Breathing
- Spitting up

In rare cases, the feeding tube can puncture the stomach.

Alternative Names

Gavage tube - infants; OG - infants; NG - infants

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Updated by: Charles I. Schwartz, MD, FAAP, Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, General Pediatrician at PennCare for Kids, Phoenixville, PA. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

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