

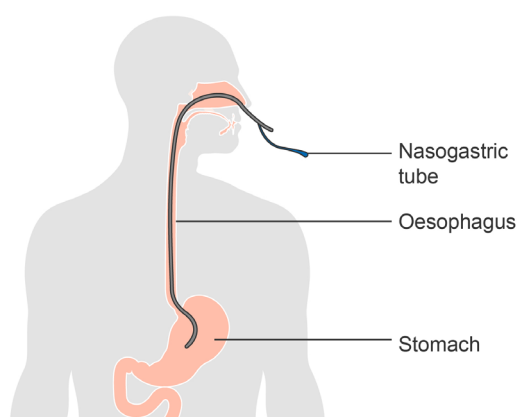
## Patient information factsheet

# Nasogastric feeding tube for head and neck radiotherapy

We have given you this factsheet because we have recommended that you have a nasogastric (NG) feeding tube as part of your radiotherapy treatment. It explains what an NG feeding tube is, why you need it and for how long. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### What is a nasogastric (NG) feeding tube?

An NG feeding tube is a thin, plastic tube that is inserted into your nostril and passed down the back of your throat into your stomach. It means that your body can receive fluids, medications and feed with added nutrients if you are unable to eat or drink normally.



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### Why do I need an NG feeding tube?

We have recommended you have an NG feeding tube because you are having radiotherapy to an area of your head or neck.

Radiotherapy to the head and neck causes temporary side effects. Side effects can be mild or more severe, depending on the size and location of the area we are treating.

A common side effect of radiotherapy is having problems with eating and drinking. This is due to:

- loss of appetite
- a lack of taste
- a sore mouth or mouth ulcers
- a dry mouth (xerostomia)
- difficulty chewing or swallowing
- pain on swallowing

Even if you are able to eat and drink normally throughout your treatment, it is unlikely that you will be able to meet your nutritional requirements (the amount of nutrients your body needs to function properly). If you are unable to meet your nutritional requirements, you may become unwell and may need to come into hospital for treatment for this (this is known as a 'hospital admission'). This admission can lead to an interruption or delay in your radiotherapy treatment. In the event that you become very unwell, we may need to stop your treatment completely.

Your NG feeding tube will act as a 'top up' of calories and fluids alongside what you manage to eat and drink to help you maintain your weight. In the later weeks of your treatment, you may be fully reliant on your NG feeding tube to meet all your nutritional requirements.

## **When will my NG feeding tube be fitted?**

In your second week of treatment, we will arrange an appointment for a nurse to fit your NG feeding tube the following week (your third week of treatment), even if you are still eating and drinking. This is because it will be more comfortable for you to have the tube inserted before you start to notice side effects (side effects tend to happen within a few weeks of starting treatment).

## **How should I prepare for the procedure?**

No preparation is needed for the procedure.

## **How long will the procedure take?**

The procedure will take approximately 10 minutes. However, please expect to be in the hospital for a little while longer, as you will need to meet with a member of our dietitian team and receive some training before you go home.

## **Will it hurt?**

You may briefly experience some discomfort during the procedure. However, it should not be painful. If you experience any pain, please let the nurse know. If necessary, the nurse may try placing the tube in your other nostril.

## **What training will I receive?**

After the nurse has placed your NG feeding tube, a member of our team will meet with you in Hamwic House at Southampton General Hospital to give you advice and make a feeding plan with you. A nurse from an external feeding company will also train you on how to care for and use your NG feeding tube. This is a good opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

We will also give you an information leaflet that contains more information about caring for your NG feeding tube.

## **How long will I need my NG feeding tube after radiotherapy treatment?**

While the NG feeding tube is expected to be a temporary measure, you are likely to still need it after you have finished treatment. This is because the side effects from treatment can take time to improve. Once your side effects from treatment have settled and you are able to eat and drink better, the NG feeding tube can be removed. Although every individual is different, most people can usually remove their NG feeding tube within a few months of finishing treatment. In rare circumstances, some people may need to have a feeding tube long term. If this is the case for you, we will discuss this with you in more detail.

# Patient information factsheet

## Are there any alternatives?

If you are unsure about having an NG feeding tube, please discuss this with us. We may be able to offer you an alternative, if appropriate.

## Contact us

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us.

### Head and neck dietitians

Telephone: **023 8120 6072**

Mobile: **07909 886314**

Email: [hndietitians@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:hndietitians@uhs.nhs.uk)

Working hours: Monday to Friday, 8am to 4.30pm

## Useful links

[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/eating-and-drinking-after-head-and-neck-cancer-treatment](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/eating-and-drinking-after-head-and-neck-cancer-treatment)

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