Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

How to Take Medications Through Your Feeding Tube

This information explains how to take medications through your feeding tube.

Before taking medications through your feeding tube

- Ask your healthcare provider if you can take your medications through your feeding tube. Most medications that you normally take by mouth can be taken through your feeding tube.
- Medications must be in liquid form or crushed into a powder to prevent your feeding tube from getting clogged. Many medications come in a liquid form. Ask your healthcare provider about liquid forms if you take pills, tablets, or capsules.
- **Tablets or capsules that are enteric-coated, extended-release (XR), or slow-release (SR) cannot be taken through your feeding tube.** Ask your healthcare provider if you can get the medication in a different form.
- Do not mix different medications together unless your healthcare provider tells you to. If you're taking more than 1 medication, ask your healthcare provider if you can take any of them together.

Keep a medication schedule

Write down your medication schedule and carry it with you. Update it when anything changes. This will make it easy for your family members or caregivers to know your medication schedule. Bring a copy of the schedule to your doctor visits. Your doctor will review your medications at each visit.

Always flush your feeding tube with water before and after you take each medication. This will prevent clogging. Flush with 60 mL of water or with amount of water recommended by your healthcare provider.

Instructions for taking medications

1. Clean your hands.
    - If you're washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands, apply soap, rub them together thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a towel. Use that same towel to turn off the faucet.
    - If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, cover your hands with it. Rub your hands together until they're dry.
2. Gather your supplies in a clean and comfortable place. Do not set up or do your tube feeding in the bathroom. You will need:
    - A small cup or glass.
    - A 60 mL legacy catheter tip or ENFit syringe.
    - Medication in liquid or powder form.
    - Mortar and pestle or a pill crusher, if needed.
    - Water (you can use tap water as long as it's safe to drink).
    - A spoon.
    - A button adapter, if you have one.
        - If you're admitted to the hospital, bring your button adapter with you, if you have one.
3. Flush your feeding tube with 60 mL of water or the amount your healthcare provider recommended. Clamp your feeding tube.
4. Follow the instructions below depending on what form your medication is in.

If your medication is in liquid form:

- Liquid medications may have sorbitol. Sorbitol can cause bloating, cramping, diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements), or all these

symptoms. If you have any of these symptoms, talk with your healthcare provider.

- Pour the medication into a small cup or measure the exact amount using a small measuring spoon. Unless you were given other instructions, take each liquid medication one at a time.
- Add at least 30 mL of water to the medication. Fill the syringe with the solution.
- Go to step 5.

If your medication is in tablet or pill form:

- Tablets and pills must be crushed to a fine powder using a mortar and pestle or a pill crusher. You can buy these at your local pharmacy. Crush each medication one at a time.
- Add at least 30 mL of warm water to each medication. Mix it well with a spoon until the medication dissolves.
- Fill the syringe with the medication. Remember to draw up each medication one at a time, unless your healthcare provider gave you other instructions.
- Go to step 5.

If your medication is a capsule:

- You must open capsules so that the powder inside can dissolve. Open the number of capsules that's in 1 dose.
- Add at least 30 mL of warm water to the medication. Mix it well with a spoon until the medication dissolves.
- Fill the syringe with the medication.
- Go to step 5.

5. Attach the syringe to your feeding tube or button adapter, if you're using one.
6. Unclamp the tube and gently push in the medication. Reclamp the tube.

7. Attach the syringe filled with 60 mL of water to your feeding tube.
8. Unclamp the tube and flush it thoroughly. Reclamp the tube.
    - Repeat the flushing if the water moves too slowly through the tube.
9. Remove the syringe.
10. Close the plug or reattach the cap at the end of your feeding tube. Remove the button adapter, if you're using one.
11. After taking the medication(s), pull the syringe apart. Wash all the parts with warm water. Let your supplies air dry.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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