

## Oesophageal tube care and feeding instructions

An oesophageal feeding tube (O-tube) is a safe and effective way to provide nutrition and medication to your pet while they are unable or unwilling to eat enough on their own. O-tubes are generally very well tolerated and, although it may look daunting at first, managing an O-tube can quickly become a regular part of you and your pet's daily routine. This information sheet will guide you through feeding, medication administration, tube care and signs to watch for, helping you feel prepared and supported throughout the process.



**Picture 1:** Photo showing a typical stoma site. There is usually some mild swelling around the site where the tube inserts into the neck and sometimes a small amount of scabbing. This is very normal and just requires some gentle cleaning.

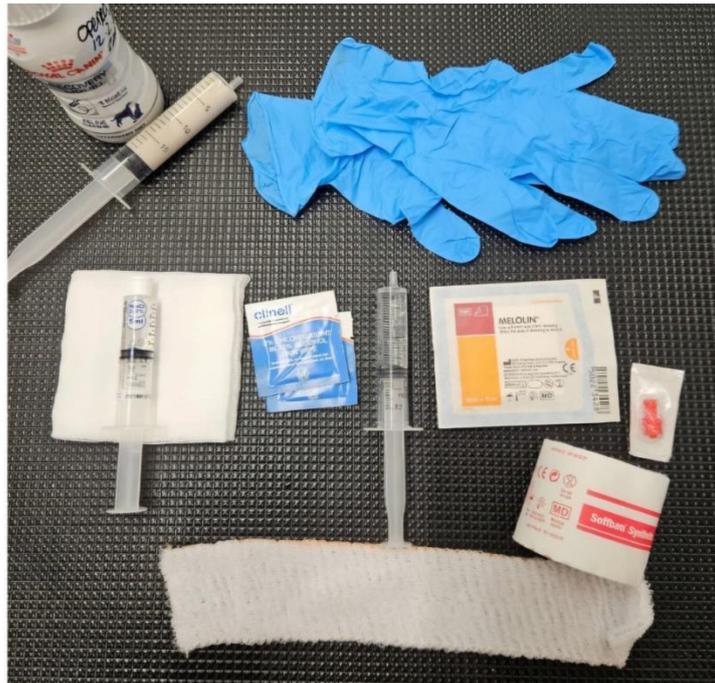
The tube is placed in the side of your pet's neck and goes directly into the oesophagus, held in place by skin sutures which will not be painful for your pet (Picture 1). The stoma site (where the O-tube enters the neck) will need checking and cleaning once a day. The O-tube can be kept in for weeks to months, as long as the site remains clean and the tube remains patent. Once your pet has started eating well without intervention then the tubes can be removed very easily at your own vets. This usually does not require the pet to be sedated.

### O-tube stoma site care

The stoma site should be cleaned once a day. This involves removing the dressing, checking that the stoma site looks okay, cleaning the stoma site and then redressing it. The step-by-step process is outlined below and a video is also available for you to watch on our website. You will be provided with a feeding tube kit which will have everything you need to care for the O-tube (Picture 2).

Your home feeding tube kit will include:

- Gloves
- Saline flush and swabs for cleaning the stoma site
- Clinell antibacterial wipes for cleaning the tube
- Syringes for flushing the tube (with tap water) and larger ones for feeding

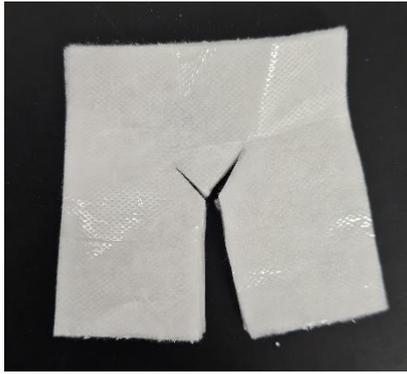


- Melonin absorbent dressing for placing over the stoma site
- Soffban padded dressing for wrapping the tube in
- Surgifix net stocking for securing the dressing in place
- Spare tube fixings to keep the tube closed when not in use
- Food suitable for tube feeds

Picture 2: Consumables that will be provided in your feeding tube kit

### Step-by-step process

1. Wash your hands and don the gloves provided. Remove all dressings covering the O-tube. In order this is: the 'Surgifix' net stocking, the padded soft dressing and the 'Melonin' absorbent dressing.
2. Check over the stoma site. There may be some minor swelling and discharge, this is normal. Use the saline flush and swab to gently clean around the insertion site (cooled boiled water can be used if you run out of saline). If you have any concerns regarding how the stoma site looks then you can take a photo to show your vet or call them to discuss your concerns.
3. Next, use a Clinell antibacterial cleaning wipe to clean the actual tube, start from the bottom of the tube where it enters the neck and wipe down towards the tip, ensuring we are cleaning away from the stoma site to prevent introducing bacteria to that area. Hold the tube with one hand while you do this to ensure you are not pulling at the tube or sutures while you clean
4. Once you are happy with the cleaning of the tube, it can be redressed. First, open the Melonin absorbent dressing and cut a slit down the middle, making a Y shape (picture 3). Then place the dressing around the tube so that the shiny side sits flush to the patient's neck.



Picture 3 – Melonin dressing with cut out to allow placement around O-tube

5. Then, take the soft padded dressing (Soffban) and wrap it around the neck, securing the dressing in place. The Soffban should just about hug the neck and not be loose, with enough space to fit a finger in easily so it is not constrictive. If the tubing is quite long, then this can be wrapped in the Soffban too so that just the tip is exposed.
6. Finally, place the tube of netted stocking over the soft dressing to keep everything in place.

### Flushing, administering food and medications down the tube

Your pet will have a specific feeding plan which will be discussed with you at the time of their discharge. This will include how much food to be given at one sitting and how often in the day you will need to give your pet a feed. You will likely be provided with a veterinary prescribed liquid food diet, which comes readily prepared in a bottle. Sometimes, if your pet has specific dietary requirements wet food can also be used, but it will need to be mixed with water and blended until it becomes a soup like texture to be able to administer it via the O-tube. If you need to use wet (rather than liquid) pet food, the vet or nurse at discharge will go through how to prepare this.

### Flushing the tube

The tube will always need to be flushed first, prior to any feeding or administering medications down the tube. Flushing the tube is important to check it is still patent, and that it is still situated correctly in the oesophagus.

1. Prepare a syringe with 2-3 mls of tap water.
2. Before taking the cap off the tip of the O-tube, fold the tube near the tip to avoid introducing air into the tube (Picture 4). Introducing air is not dangerous, but it can cause gas to accumulate in the stomach, which can be uncomfortable.
3. Attach the syringe with water and flush slowly with 2-3 mls of tap water.
4. While flushing the tube, watch your pet for any signs of coughing or feeling



Picture 4: Demonstrating how to pinch tube in between attaching syringes to minimise air entering the stomach

uncomfortable. If your pet starts to cough then this may mean the tube is no longer correctly placed; stop flushing immediately and contact your vet if this happens.

5. If your pet remains comfortable, you can continue with a feed or administering medication.

### Administering food down the tube

1. Draw up the required amount of food needed for one meal in the syringes provided. You will also need 5mls of tap water to flush the tube with after the feed, this ensures no food sits in the tube and gets lodged, blocking the tube.
2. After flushing the tube as above, connect the syringe with food in to the tip.
3. Start the feed slowly at first, giving 2-3mls over one minute and see how your pet reacts. If your pet seems comfortable you can increase feeding time to 5mls over a minute or even 10mls over a minute for larger dogs. If at any point your pet shows sign of nausea, drooling or lip smacking then pause briefly and slow down the tube feed. If your pet starts to wretch, regurgitate or vomit then stop the feed immediately.
4. Once the tube feed is finished, pinch the tube and reattach the tap water and flush the tube with 5mls of water to avoid food clogging up the tube, and reattach the cap.

We recommend tempting your pet with food before feeding them through the O-tube. The vet or nurse discharging your pet will work out their daily calorie requirement while they are recovering, and suggest how much food to offer at each meal time. You can then adjust how much feed you give via the O-tube depending on how much food your pet eats voluntarily, following the below feeding recommendations:

Voluntary intake	Tube feeding recommendation
0-10% of meal eaten	Administer <b>100%</b> of tube feed
25% of meal eaten	Administer <b>75%</b> of tube feed
50% of meal eaten	Administer <b>50%</b> of tube feed
75% of meal eaten	Administer <b>25%</b> of tube feed
80% or more of meal eaten	Skip tube feed

## Administering medication down the tube

- Liquid medications can simply be administered via the tube by syringe
- Capsules should be opened and the contents emptied into a small pot. Mix a small volume of water into the contents, mix well and suction up into a syringe before administering via the tube
- Tablets should be crushed very finely (pill crushers are available from most pharmacies) and then suspended in water as described above.
- If you are administering several medications at once, flush 1ml of water between each medication.
- Remember that the tube should be flushed with 5ml of water after administering the medications. This ensures that the medication reaches the patient, as well as preventing tube blockages.

## If the tube becomes blocked

If the tube seems blocked and you are unable to flush the tube, try flushing with 10ml of **warm water** using a large-bore syringe (20ml in cats and 60ml in dogs). Use a gentle, rhythmic push-pull pressure.

- Secure syringe to the feeding tube port, slowly depress the plunger using steady, moderate pressure (do not slam or force it), then gently pull back on the plunger to create suction.
- Repeat this action several times (push-pull-push-pull). Use small, controlled movements (1-3 ml at a time). Hopefully this will break up any compacted food or dislodge any medication residue.
- If this does not resolve the blockage, then allow the warm water to sit in the tube for 5-10 minutes, before repeating the above technique.
- If resistance suddenly gives way, stop and flush gently to confirm patency.
- If the patient coughs, gags or shows discomfort then stop immediately.
- If the blockage does not clear after a few attempts, then call your vet.