

# SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

## A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Whilst difficulty swallowing is a common concern for patients living with a terminal illness, most dying people will not benefit from a tube. Sometimes patients with head and neck cancer or neurodegenerative diseases choose to have a PEG inserted.

### What is a PEG?

PEG (Percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy) involves the insertion of a flexible tube, also known as enteral tube, through a patient's abdominal wall, into the stomach (figure 1). Insertion of the tube directly bypasses the patient's mouth and oesophagus allowing for the administration of nutrition, fluids and/or medications.

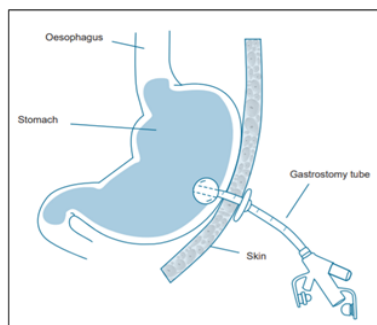


Figure 1: Placement of ballooned gastrostomy tube.

### When is a PEG indicated?

A PEG tube may be indicated in patients who:

- > Have a functional gastrointestinal tract but have difficulties swallowing
- > Are unable to tolerate any oral intake
- > Struggle to achieve adequate oral nutritional intake – these patients may still be able to take some medicines orally.

### Role of the Pharmacist

Pharmacists are ideally placed to address queries from consumers about medicines and administration using the PEG tube. *Don't Rush to Crush* is an excellent resource and available via MIMS on the 'Crush?' tab for each monograph.

### Medication administration

Alternative routes of delivery could be explored prior to administration through

enteral tubes. Topical, sublingual, buccal, parenteral or rectal routes may be viable options depending on formulation availability and patient preference. Where possible minimise number of administration times to simplify the process. Each medication should be given individually and not mixed together prior to administration.

### Medication absorption

It is important that medicines retain their original absorption characteristics whilst being in a form that does not obstruct the tube. Appropriateness of release rates should be ensured prior to crushing or diluting any medicine for administration. Note that the physical characteristics of a formulation may also limit their use via PEG e.g. large granules and viscous liquids may not pass through the tube.

### Medication compatibility

The bioavailability of each medication should be considered prior to mixing or diluting for administration. Physical incompatibility may occur with enteral nutrition (feeds) and should be spaced from medications when needed.

Thankyou to Joshua Hogben for your contribution.

### Resources

- > [How to give your medicine by enteral tube](#) – Patient information (SHPA)

### For more information

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This update is intended to provide practical up to date and factual information relating to pharmacy and medicines management in the setting of Palliative Care and is based on critical review of available evidence. Individual patient circumstances must be considered when applying this information. Please feel free to distribute this update further to interested colleagues.