Tubes, Catheters, and Drains Used in Cancer Treatment and Care

Tubes or drains may be used during or after cancer treatment. Not everyone will need a tube or drain. If you do, your cancer care team will teach you how to care for it.

Some common tubes and drains used in cancer treatment are:

- Oxygen tubes
- Tubes to give liquid nourishment (food or feedings) or medicine
- Tubes to drain fluids from the body

**Oxygen tubes**

You may be given oxygen if your levels are low. Oxygen can be given through a tube placed under the nose (called a nasal cannula) or a mask that goes over the mouth and nose. Tubing connects the cannula or mask to an oxygen tank or oxygen concentrator. Ask your cancer care team if you need oxygen equipment that you can travel with.

It’s important to follow the oxygen safety instructions. Make sure you know how to care for the tank and other equipment.

**Never let anyone smoke or use fire, including candles and gas stoves, in areas where oxygen is being used.**

**Tubes to give liquid nourishment or medicine**
Liquid nourishment (food or feedings) or medicine may be given through a tube placed in the stomach or the small intestine (bowel). They are often called tube feedings.

- If feedings are needed for a short time, a tube can be put in through the nose and into the stomach (called a nasogastric tube, or NG tube) or small intestine (called a nasojejunal tube, or NJ tube) without needing surgery.
- If feedings are needed for a longer time, surgery might be done to place a feeding tube through the skin of the belly and into the stomach (called a gastrostomy tube, or G tube) or the small intestine (called a jejunostomy tube, or J tube).

These tubes can be used to give feedings, medicines, and fluids. They can be helpful if you can’t swallow, eat, or drink.

If you are going home with tubes or other equipment, your cancer care team will teach you how to care for them and what problems to watch for.

**Tubes to drain fluids from the body**

Tubes may be used to remove extra fluids from the body after surgery or procedure or from the cancer. They may also be called drains.

Tubes and drains used in cancer treatment may be placed:

- During surgery to help remove extra fluids that can build up. They can be placed in many places such as the breast, chest, belly, neck, and head. Common types include **Jackson Pratt (JP)**, **Penrose**, and **Hemovac drains**.
- Through the nose and into the stomach (**nasogastric or NT tube**), in the stomach (**gastric or G tube**), or in the rectum (**rectal tube**) to remove fluid from a blockage (obstruction) or after surgery.
- In the chest between the ribs to remove extra fluid around the lung that can build up due to certain cancers (**pleural tube** or **catheter**).
- In the belly to remove extra fluids that can build up due to certain cancers (**intraperitoneal drain**).
- In the bile duct (tubes that connect the liver and gallbladder to the small intestine) to remove extra fluid that can build up due to some cancers (**biliary drain**).
- In the bladder to drain urine (**urinary catheter** or **urostomy**).
- In the rectum drain stool (**fetal catheter** or **catheter**).
- Over a stoma (opening in the belly made during surgery) to drain stool (**colostomy** or **ileostomy**).
- Through the skin and into the trachea (windpipe) to help you breathe (tracheostomy[^4] or trach tube).

If you are going home with any drains or tubes, your cancer care team will teach you how to care for them and what problems to watch for.

**Hyperlinks**


**References**


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