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# Feeding tubes can be lifelines for ill cats

My kitty, Keiki, is sick. She is almost 17 years old. She was losing weight and had normal blood tests and X-rays, but was vomiting. An abdominal ultrasound showed a small mass in the right upper quadrant of her abdomen. I performed exploratory surgery and took biopsies.



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FOR THE REGISTER

The biopsies confirmed

a malignant tumor on her pancreatic duct, but cancer had not spread anywhere else. I was concerned that although she was eating before surgery, she might not afterward, so I placed an esophagostomy feeding tube.

Feeding tubes can be lifelines for cats. Many will not eat when they are sick, even when they don't have life-threatening illnesses. If a cat doesn't eat for a couple of days, it is at risk for developing hepatic lipidosis, also known as fatty liver disease, and this condition complicates matters even further and is serious.

No animal's body can heal without proper nutrition, so a feeding tube creates an easy way to feed and medicate a sick cat. Trying to make a sick cat eat is challenging, and trying to orally syringe food into a cat's mouth is difficult.

There are several types of feeding tubes that are used in cats. The easiest one to place for short-term feeding is called a nasogas-



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**Feeding tubes create an easy way to feed and medicate a sick cat. This one is held in place with a Kitty Kollar.**

tric tube. The tube actually only goes from the nose to the esophagus. Using some topical anesthetic, an NG tube can be placed in a cat that is awake and is secured with sutures or surgical staples. It provides a temporary means for delivering nutrition to a sick cat, using a liquid diet.

The type of feeding tube we use most often in cats is the e-tube, or esophagostomy tube. It is what I placed in Keiki. It is also used in cats with hepatic lipidosis. An e-tube is placed using heavy sedation or general anesthesia through the left side of the neck and into the esophagus. It is secured with sutures, and then we protect it with a great wrap called a Kitty Kollar ([kittykollar.com](http://kittykollar.com)) which also keeps it in place. E-tubes, if kept clean and managed properly, can stay in for days, months, or longer if needed. The e-tube has a much larger diameter than the NG tube, so thicker, more caloric foods can be fed through it.

Cats with e-tubes can still eat and drink if they are willing. The tube exits from the side of the neck, so it

doesn't interfere with the mouth or face. Surprisingly, cats do not scratch or rub out the tube. It really doesn't seem to bother them. Liquid medications can easily be put through the tube, and most pills can be crushed and mixed with food and administered through the tube.

I am a huge proponent of feeding tubes when we have cats that are not eating and cannot be easily hand- or syringe-fed. It is better to place tubes at an early stage and not wait until the patient is more critical or weak. It may seem scary to have to feed your cat through a tube, but it becomes easy with practice.

I hope your kitty never needs a feeding tube, but if it does, be open-minded to the great benefits it can offer. You don't have to struggle with oral pilling, liquid gagging, or forced feedings with your sick cat, and this relieves stress for the cat and owner.

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