

Home Blended Food for Tube Feeding: Is it a Good Choice for My Child?

Most families who provide tube feeds for their children may use formula because it has a known nutrition content and is convenient. Some families may choose to make their own blended food and meals for tube feeding.

Understanding the benefits and challenges of using home blended food for tube feeding may help you decide whether it is a good choice for your child.

To get you started, think about the questions listed below. You can discuss these questions with your healthcare team.

Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is my child able to have a variety of foods?• Is my child able to digest food?• Does my child have a healthy immune system?
Nutrition needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do I have a variety of foods to make healthy blended meals for my child?• Am I comfortable providing my child's nutrition through blended food?• Will my child be able to get enough nutrition in a volume they tolerate?• Can my child's special diet needs (for example, food allergies) be met by using blended food?
Feeding tube	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does my child have a feeding tube that can be used for home blended food? <p>Check with your home nutrition support team about which feeding tubes may be used.</p>
Feeding method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can my child be fed using a gravity feeding set or syringe?• Can my child be fed a meal in less than 2 hours?• Does my child receive all of their nutrition during the daytime?
Shopping and cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Am I able to shop for groceries and supplies when they are needed?• Do I have access to a kitchen with a fridge and a high power blender?• Do I have the time, skills, and confidence to prepare blended food?• Can I safely store my blended food?

Blended food for tube feeding

You can blend homemade food and fluids to make meals for tube feeding. You can feed your child only home blended food, or you can use both home blended food and formulas.

Benefits of home blended food for tube feeding

You can include many different foods in your child's diet.

- You can make foods that meet your child's allergy and special diet needs.
- You can add foods that appeal to your child. They may eat the same foods your family is eating.
- Home blended food usually costs less than formula. This will depend on your child's nutrition needs and foods chosen.
- You have flexibility to use home blended food or formula to fit your child's routine.
- You can choose foods that have fewer additives and preservatives, and no added sugar.
- Your child's bowel movements (stools) may be more regular with home blended food.
- Your child may have reduced reflux, vomiting, and retching with home blended food.

Challenges

- The food your child receives may change day to day. This means that their nutrition needs may not be met every day, but will be met over a period of time.
- Your child may not tolerate the amount of home blended food required to meet their nutrition needs. The amount of home blended food needed may be more than formula.
- Your child may have trouble tolerating home blended food if they have digestion problems.
- Home blended food may take more time and effort than buying formula.
- Home blended food may get stuck in your child's tube. This may happen if the meal is not blended smooth, the tube is too small, or the tube is not the right type for use with home blended food.

Common questions

• **How long will it take for my child to change from formula to home blended food?**

Your child may need 4–6 weeks to change to home blended meals. Talk with your dietitian for what this may look like for your child.

• **Who will help me transition to home blended meals?**

Your child's dietitian will help you with the process to transition your child to home blended food. Your dietitian will also help you make sure your child's nutrition needs are met.

• **Will blended meals require a lot of time and effort?**

It may take a little extra time at the start to make blended meals. But the more you do it, the faster you'll be. Home blended meals may take about the same amount of time as a regular family meal for cooking and clean-up.

Feeding equipment

Talk with your healthcare team about your equipment and supply needs for home blended food. Alberta home nutrition support programs do not routinely provide pumps for use with home blended food. You can offer home blended food by syringe or large bore gravity feeding.