



Tube Terminology: The Power of the Words We Use

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The words we use reflect our attitudes. The terminology used in tube feeding and tube transitions is very important. Let us think about the words we use when we offer tube feedings to children.

"Mealtimes"

Tube feedings are mealtimes. We nourish our children with calories, but we also nourish them emotionally. Mealtimes are social, conversational, sensory, and explorational. They are gatherings where children learn about food, master the skills of eating and learn manners. They are together times that build the foundations for a lifetime of food enjoyment.

Our hope is that tube fed children be able to experience all those important parts of the family mealtime while receiving great tube nutrition. Yes, their food enters the stomach from a different tube, a feeding tube rather than an esophagus (mouth to stomach) tube, but it is *still* nutrition and is *still* a meal.

Think about it. Common tube terms such "boluses", "extensions", "ports", "drip feeding", "pump feedings", "doses", "syringes", "procedures", and "ounces, cc's or mLs" can sound procedural and medical. Those words do not reflect mealtimes. We need words that help us think about tube feedings differently and turn them back into *mealtimes* with all the social, emotional, communication and nutritional variations of our mealtimes with the rest of the family. Can we substitute "mealtime" words for the tube feedings? How might our interactions or feelings about the tube change if we call the tube nutrition "meals", "breakfast", "snack", "lunch" or "dinner"?

"Tube and Mouth"

As these children are able to eat increasing amounts of tastes and servings by mouth the terms change again. The food is no longer offered just by tube so a distinction is needed reflecting *where* the food is being offered, tummy or mouth? How about "tube meal" or an "oral meal"? Or a "tummy meal" or "mouth meal"? Or "tummy snack", "mouth snack" or "mouth taste"?

"Feedings?"

What about the term "feeding" itself? It sounds like something done TO a child. This may well be appropriate terminology when beginning tube feedings, as we do refer to *feedings* with breast and bottle-fed infants. However, as orally fed children get older, we no longer use the term "feeding". They become more able to actively participate in the mealtime process. They feed themselves. They participate in the meals, meal preparations, food choices and volumes. Children with tubes can be partners in these aspects of mealtimes too. By referring to tube feedings in *meal* terms, we partner with parents and children to support developmental and emotional growth in all aspects of the meal, not JUST calorie intake.

Consider the vocabulary that works within each family. Thinking of tube feedings in *meal* terms connects the child who has a tube with the family meal routine rather than being isolated with their procedure far away from family meal table.

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