What is a RIG?

A RIG is a feeding tube that is inserted through the abdominal wall into the stomach. It is used for people who are unable to eat at all, or cannot eat enough. The RIG tube must remain in place for at least 2 weeks and can remain in place for as long as it is needed.

What will happen?

Before the procedure your doctor will explain why a RIG is appropriate for you to maintain your feeding in this way and inform you of the risks involved. You will be asked to sign a consent form but if you are unable to sign the form, your doctor will discuss the procedure with you and your relatives and will sign the form. If you have any worries or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask.

You will need to be admitted to hospital for a minimum of 1-2 days.

The procedure for RIG insertion

Before the RIG is inserted you will not be allowed to eat anything for 4 hours due to the risk of aspiration. The RIG will be fitted whilst you are in the X-ray department and is carried out under sterile conditions. You will need to wear a hospital gown to allow access to the abdominal (tummy) wall. A nurse will stay with you throughout the procedure and the doctor performing the procedure will give you a pain killer and a mild sedative to make you feel relaxed. However this is not a general anaesthetic and you will be awake during the procedure and feel no after effects of the sedative. You will also be given antibiotics through a small needle in your hand just before the procedure. A temporary small tube (a nasogastric tube) will be placed in through your nose into your stomach which will allow sufficient air to be passed to inflate the stomach to make it clearly visible on ultrasound before the RIG is placed.

The radiologist will then numb the skin around the identified RIG site with local anaesthetic before making a small cut just below the rib cage. He will then pass the feeding tube through this opening. Stitches will be needed to anchor the RIG tube. These anchor sutures are cut between 10 to 14 days after your procedure.

Following your procedure you will be taken to the recovery area for a short period before returning to the ward.

A small probe is placed on one of your fingers, this will record your oxygen levels and pulse rate.

What happens after the RIG is fitted?

Once the RIG tube is placed it will not be used for six hours and you will remain nil by mouth during this time.

You may feel bloated as a result of the air remaining in your stomach this usually passes quickly and requires no treatment. You may feel mild discomfort around the RIG tube following the procedure for 2-3 days which should settle quickly, do inform the nursing staff who can give you some painkillers.

After this time your doctor/health professional will assess you before feeding starts. This time also allows time to recover from the sedation used through the procedure. While using the RIG for feeding it is important that you sit upright to a minimum of 30 degree (about 2 plump pillows). This reduces the risk of developing chest infection. The feed is usually started slowly and gradually increased.

The dietitian will provide a plan of how soon and how fast the feed can start. It is important to inform your nurse or doctor if you experience discomfort in your abdomen while the feed is running. There are various options for feeding rates and the dietitian will find the one most suited for your lifestyle and nutritional needs.

Can anything go wrong?

All medical procedures carry risk. Occasionally a problem arises because the RIG tube damages the stomach or leads to a leak of stomach contents. This is known as a perforation or the needle placed through the abdominal wall may damage a vessel leading to bleeding. These types of problems are rare and can be resolved with some simple treatments, approx 5-10 per hundred cases. Occasionally problems may be more serious and the complications may require special treatment that may include an operation. The risk from infections may be more serious but can be easily treated with antibiotics.

Occasionally the RIG tube may become dislodged or fall out and need replacing. You will be informed of whom to contact.
prior to discharge home if this was to happen.

Benefits of RIG tube placement

The benefits of placing a RIG tube are it is a relatively safe and simple technique that allows nourishment to be placed directly into the stomach. It is more comfortable and a longer term method of feeding than a nasogastric tube. Some medications can be put down the RIG tube. It is important that you discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist as some types of medication cannot be given in this way and you may need to be changed to a liquid preparation.

Care of RIG tube

Good hygiene is important when handling the RIG tube and feeding equipment and it is essential that you start by washing your hands.

The RIG tube will need to be flushed with water regularly after you use it, to prevent blockage. If the RIG tube becomes blocked, you can try to clear it with warm water or using fizzy water. If the blockage does not clear easily, then contact your doctor or district nurse.

It is important to keep the area around the RIG site clean. Once the dressing has been removed normally 7 to 10 days. Clean daily around the RIG site using soap and water followed by thorough drying of the skin.

You will need to have the stitches removed from the RIG site after 10 to 14 days.

This will be arranged prior to discharge home.

When can I take a bath?

For the first 2 weeks you should not cover the tube in water and should have showers not baths. In about 2-3 weeks the area around the RIG site should have healed fully. You will then be able to bath or swim without problems.

When to get medical help/advice

Contact details will be given to you on discharge

Once discharged home you should seek advice if you experience any of the following

- Fever
- Pain
- The tube falls out
- You find the tube blocked despite simple measures to clear it (warm water)
- You have a lot of leakage around the tube

If you have any queries or would like some more information please contact the Nutrition Nurse Specialists on 01823 343885

Muscgrove Park Hospital

Radiologically Inserted Gastrostomy (RIG)