17.1: Enteral Tube Management Introduction

Learning Objectives

- Administer enteral nutrition
- Perform irrigation and suctioning of enteral tubes
- Select appropriate equipment
- Explain the procedure to the patient
- Assess tube placement
- Implement measures to prevent displacement of tube
- Modify procedures to reflect variations across the life span
- Document actions and observations
- Recognize and report significant deviations from norms

Enteral tubes are tubes placed in the gastrointestinal tract. Enteral tubes are used as an alternate route for feeding and medication administration, as well as for stomach decompression. Stomach decompression is a medical term that refers to removing stomach contents by using suctioning. Stomach decompression is commonly used after surgery or trauma to reduce pressure from fluids and gas that cause pain, nausea, vomiting, and potential aspiration of stomach contents into the lungs.

The nurse’s responsibilities when caring for a patient with an enteral tube include the following:

- assessing tube placement and patency
- assessing and cleansing the insertion site
- administering tube feeding
• administering medication
• irrigating/flushing the tube
• suctioning the tube
• monitoring for complications

Administering enteral medication is discussed in “Administration of Enteral Medications.” The remaining responsibilities related to maintaining enteral tubes will be discussed in this chapter.