



Complex Child E-Magazine

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Lauren's Story: Tube Feeding at College by Lauren

My name is Lauren, but you may know me as soxgirl24 online. I'm 22 years old and going into my third semester at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) this fall. I'm a technical theatre major and a part time student. I'm active in my school's PRIDE club, Japanese-American Culture Club, and the Society of Paranormal Investigations. And as far as I know, I'm the only student at CCSU with a feeding tube.

I got my feeding tube right after my first semester, on December 19th, 2007. I had to medically withdraw during my second semester but was allowed to remain active in my clubs.

Tube feeding at college was overwhelming at first. When you're in elementary, middle, or even high school, you have the support of the school system when you have medical issues. But when you're in college, you're on your own. Thankfully, I was able to create my own little support circle with my friends from PRIDE. In fact, the PRIDE office has become my safe-haven whenever I need to do something with my tube (hook up, unhook, change the dressing, vent).



I'm usually good at planning on how much tube-feeding formula to make depending on how long I think I'll be on campus. A few times I've had to run down to the food court

and ask the barista at Starbucks for eight ounces of room temperature water in the shaker I use to mix my EleCare formula. I got a few odd looks the first time, but I think they got used to me asking for just water and fruit.

Carrying my books was something that I thought would be a problem. Last year, I used a backpack from L.L. Bean for my feeding pump and bag and a shoulder bag for my laptop, which was all I needed at that point. Then I used an adult size Zevex bag that fit my Joey pump perfectly, and had my L.L. Bean bag (for books) and my laptop case set up on a luggage cart I bought relatively cheap. This way, I was able to pull the bags behind me and keep minimal weight on my back. Now I carry my Zevex bag on my back, and use a messenger bag for my books/emergency tube stuff. It actually works out better than the luggage cart as it doesn't get in people's ways, and is easier to get around campus.



In one pouch of my bag, I keep a small insulated lunchbox containing a MIC tube, a small packet of lube, gauze, Qtips, a pre-filled syringe with 5cc of water (for the balloon on the MIC tube), a decompression tube and 60cc syringe, my emergency medicines and the syringes needed for those, and my medical information. I also wear a MedicAlert bracelet that says I have a gastrostomy.

There have been a few downsides to tube feeding in college, though. PRIDE members go on a retreat every year that I'm unable to attend. They stay in a cabin in the woods overnight and I would have to bring my IV pole, pump, charger, and reflux pillow, which is a lot to lug to the woods for one night. Another downside is that I don't go on any of

the camping trips that my other club goes on for the same reasons as the retreat, and because they don't have electricity at the park they camp out at.

I consider that a small price to pay, however, for something that can keep me healthy and keep me out of the danger zone I was in before I got the tube.