

# PE baby, unable to eat, must go to hospital in Austria to be cured

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WHAT some mothers take for granted – feeding their babies – is only a dream for one Port Elizabeth mother.

Brene and Robert Hershensohn, of Westering, are so desperate to teach their 18-month-old son, Tayden, to eat and drink, that they have booked him in for a programme at an Austrian hospital which deals specifically with babies with his condition.

Tayden suffers from feeding tube dependency, a condition he developed after having a tube inserted into his stomach last June because he had pneumonia.

Tube dependency is an unintended result of long-term tube feeding in infants and young children.

Tayden's tube was inserted after he refused to drink because his milk was being ingested into his lungs as a result of the pneumonia.

"When he was three months old, he was getting sick all the time and we could not figure out why. We now know that

this was because of the pneumonia. He learnt, the way babies sometimes do, that when ever he drank he would become sick, so he just stopped drinking altogether," Hershensohn said.

After a series of investigations and tests, they discovered that Tayden suffered from both pneumonia and reflux. They took him to a hospital in Cape Town, where he had the feeding tube (gastrostomy) inserted into his stomach to sustain him during a series of operations.

"He was in hospital more than 25 times last year and had three operations – he even spent Christmas in hospital. One of the operations was to have his stomach turned. He was very tiny – at nine months he weighed only 7kg."

Hershensohn said Tayden was able to eat for a brief time. "Then as soon as we came home he just clamped down and refused to eat and drink. He has not had anything to drink since June and is totally dependent on his feeding tube."

Tayden needs to go into hospital



SEEKING HELP... Brene Hershensohn with her son, Tayden. Picture: BEVERLEY DARLOW

regularly because the feeding tube occasionally becomes infected.

"Our goal is to get Tayden to eat independently so that we can remove his tube – so that he can be a normal little boy. He does eat up to 10 teaspoons of food a day, but it is not enough to sustain him – some days he does not eat a single thing.

"This has affected his social skills. He started walking very late and he did not crawl. He has fallen back in learning how to speak."

Hershensohn said there was no one in South Africa who could help Tayden learn how to eat and drink. They had made contact with a children's hospital in Graz, Austria. The hospital's programme had a 95% success rate with babies with this condition, she said.

Hershensohn said she needed to raise R180 000 before September to get Tayden to Graz for treatment.

Tayden's paediatrician, Dr Dave Purchase, said the toddler's condition was extremely rare.