



Home Medical Equipment: Tracheostomy

The neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) team celebrates with you as your baby goes home! After graduation from the NICU, your baby will need special home medical equipment (also called durable medical equipment) to help keep him or her well.

What is a tracheostomy?

A tracheostomy is surgically created so air enters the windpipe and lungs directly through the neck instead of going through the nose and mouth. This causes some changes in how the body works.

Vendor Information

A company, also called a vendor, will bring the equipment to your home and teach you how to use and manage any problems with the equipment that may arise.

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Other Emergency Numbers: _____

Important Things to Remember

- Air now bypasses the voice box, or vocal cords, so your baby may or may not be able to make voice noises.
- Breathing through the mouth and nose filters, warms, and moistens air. Your baby will need extra moisture to keep the airway from drying out and to keep mucus thin.
- You can give moisture through a “trach collar.” This is a humidifier with flexible tubing and a mask that fits loosely over the tracheostomy.
- You can also use an “artificial nose” that collects the moisture and heat that your baby breathes out. The “nose” puts the heat and moisture back in with every breath.

Stoma Care

The stoma is the opening in the neck. It is very important to keep the skin around the tracheostomy clean and dry.

- Look at the skin for any red or irritated areas.
- Clean this area at least twice a day; more frequent cleaning may be needed.
- Wash hands with soap and water before performing any cares.
- Use cotton-tip applicators or lint-free gauze to clean around the stoma.
- Use a mild, fragrance-free soap and water.
- Use a rolling motion, starting at the stoma and working outward. This will prevent you from pushing dried secretions or soap into the tracheostomy.
- Rinse with water and then dry the area completely.

Suctioning

Suctioning is a way to keep the airway clear. Suction the tracheostomy if you notice that your baby is

- breathing faster or harder
- tugging or pulling the skin around and under the ribs with each breath
- pale, gray, or blue color especially around the mouth or has a decreased oxygen saturation
- frightened or anxious looking
- bubbling mucus out of the tracheostomy tube
- making rattling or whistling sounds
- refusing to eat or drink.



In children with no evidence of secretions, a minimum of suctioning, at morning and bedtime, to check for patency of the tube is recommended.

Suction Technique

To suction your baby you need to

1. Wash hands with soap and water before performing any cares.
2. Remove the catheter from the package, taking care not to touch the tip of the catheter.
3. Turn on the suction machine and attach the catheter to the tubing.
4. Insert the catheter into the trach tube to the premeasured depth.
5. Place your thumb over the suction port.
6. Withdraw the catheter using a rotating motion.
7. Limit suction time to less than 5 seconds.
8. Suction catheter size.
9. Suction catheter insertion depth.

Changing the Tracheostomy Tube

If the tube is plugged it may need to be changed. Your team recommends a routine change every day. Have all of your supplies ready before you begin to change the tube.

1. Wash hands with soap and water before performing any care.
2. Put the obturator into the clean tube.
3. Attach a tracheostomy tie to one side of the neck plate.
4. Lightly coat the tip of the tube with a water-soluble lubricant.
5. Use a roll under your baby's shoulders to extend the neck.
6. Keep the head straight.
7. Hold the old tube in place while the trach tie is loosened.
8. Remove the old tube.
9. Put the clean tube in using a downward curving motion.
10. Remove the obturator and secure the trach tie to the other side of the tube.

Cleaning the Reusable Supplies

- Use warm, soapy water to clean supplies. Rinse well and air dry thoroughly.

Keeping Your Baby Safe and Healthy

- Make sure all who come in contact with your baby washes their hands and do not have any symptoms of illness.
- Your baby should not be around anyone who smokes. Smoke will irritate the airway and lungs and make it hard to breathe.
- Keep your home free from lint, dust, and fine pet hair.
- Do not use powders, strong cleaning products, or aerosol sprays in the same room with your baby.
- Choose clothes that do not block the tracheostomy. Avoid high necklines and clothes that shed fibers or lint.
- Do not have toys with small parts that could fit inside the tracheostomy.
- Bath water must be shallow to avoid splashing. Water will go directly to the lungs if it gets in the tracheostomy. When your baby is sitting up, make sure the tracheostomy isn't blocked.

Signs of Illness

Call your health care provider if your baby has

- a fever above 101 °F
- mucus that is yellow or green or smells bad



- blood in secretions
- breathing problems that do not improve after suctioning.

Signs of an Emergency

- Make sure all local emergency responders (e.g., fire, police, ambulance), and electric, gas, water, phone companies know of your baby's condition.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers including the local emergency room and your pediatrician.
- Ensure any family members or friends that take care of your baby know who to call and what to do in an emergency.
- An emergency can happen at any time. If the tracheostomy is not working your baby will not be able to get enough air in and out of the lungs. In an emergency call out for help, begin CPR, and call 911. Some common emergencies are:
 - inability to clear the tube with suctioning (it is probably plugged)
 - inability to replace the tracheostomy tube

Keep the following equipment with you at all times, including leaving your home:

- suctioning equipment (suction machine, catheters, saline)
- tube change supplies (extra trach tubes with obturators) (same size and one size smaller), lubricant, tracheostomy ties
- self-inflating resuscitation bag and mask.

The above information is to help you better understand your baby's care. Always follow the instructions given by your baby's health-care provider and ask questions if you have concerns about your baby.