

Your Care at Home: Tracheotomy Care

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Narrator

You've had a tracheotomy, surgery to create an opening in your windpipe to help you breathe, and you may need it for a while.

In the next few minutes, we're going to show you some best practices for caring for this opening and the tube that's inserted through it. Now, as with any medical procedure, your healthcare provider may have specific instructions that he or she may want you to follow. Be sure to listen to their advice.

Before you leave the hospital, a nurse or licensed care provider should teach you how to care for your tracheostomy. Take advantage of this. You and your family should ask questions and actually demonstrate what you've learned. It will give you greater peace of mind as you go home.

Because the tracheostomy tube, or trach tube is the airway to bring oxygen to your lungs, it's critically important to keep the tube and the opening around it clean. Of course, as with any cleaning procedure, be sure to wash your hands both before and after you clean your tracheostomy. The opening, called the stoma, should be cleaned every day with mild soap and water. Replace the dressing with a clean dry one.

Your trach tube also needs to be cared for daily to keep it working properly. This includes:

- Suctioning the tube as recommended by your healthcare provider so it doesn't get blocked by secretions,
- Cleaning the tube, and
- Humidifying the air you breathe

Make sure you follow the techniques you were taught in the hospital for these procedures. In caring for your trach, always be on the lookout for any sign of infection. This might include:

- A fever or chills
- A cough
- Redness or swelling
- New or increasing pain
- Bleeding
- Any pus at the opening or stoma, or
- Nausea or vomiting that persists more than 2 days after you leave the hospital despite anti-nausea medications

Contact your healthcare provider if you experience any of these symptoms. Obviously, because the trach tube is helping you to breathe, it's critical that it remains in place. If you experience a forceful fit of coughing or you feel like you are choking and the tube is coming out, you'll need help immediately.

Before you leave the hospital, make sure you've established a plan for someone who lives with you or neighbor to handle such emergencies, since speech may not be an option. If you're going outside, be sure to cover your tracheostomy with a scarf or other cloth, so that dust and dirt cannot get in. Being very cautious about breathing in water or small particles through your tracheostomy, such as powders, sprays or bits of food will also go a long way to keeping you and your tracheostomy safe.