

Caring for Your Tracheostomy

Now that you have a trach, there are a few things you'll need to know and learn to take care of it: suctioning, cleaning your stoma, and cleaning the inner cannula.

These things prevent infection and help your trach do its job so that you can breathe easily.

At first, it may seem like a lot to do, but soon it'll become easier and be a part of your normal routine.

Let's start with suctioning.

Suctioning removes the mucus and secretions from your trach tube.

It's done when coughing can't clear your trach tube.

Suction the trach as often as your doctor recommends or as needed.

Before you leave the hospital, your care team will teach you how.

Once you're home, follow the directions you were given to set up and use the suctioning machine.

Always wash your hands with soap and water for at least 30 seconds before and after you suction.

Now let's talk about your stoma and the inner cannula—what they are and how to clean them.

The cannula is the tube inside your trach.

And the stoma is the opening in your neck.

You'll need to clean the stoma 2 times a day and as needed.

Remember, it's important to wash your hands with soap and water before and after you clean the stoma.

To get started, you'll need sterile water or sterile saline, 8 or 10 cotton swabs, 1 small cup, a dry cloth, a mirror, and skin ointment.

In the cup, pour the sterile water or sterile saline.

Using the cotton swabs and sterile water or sterile saline, clean and remove the dried mucus around the stoma.

Dry your skin with the cloth.

Follow your doctor's instructions for using the ointment for your stoma.

Now, here's how to clean the inner cannula.

You'll need to do this 2 times every day and as needed.

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And, as always, start by washing your hands.

Next, get 2 small bowls, a small brush, sterile water or sterile saline, and a mirror.

Pour a small amount of sterile water or sterile saline into both bowls.

First, you'll need to unlock the inner cannula.

Then carefully remove it by gently pulling it out and down.

Now, soak the cannula in the first bowl.

Next, clean the inside and outside of the cannula with the brush.

Then rinse the cannula in the second bowl of sterile water or sterile saline.

Shake the cannula out, and then slide it gently back into the outer cannula.

Turn it to lock it back into place.

Check to be sure that it's locked and that you can't pull it out.

It's a good idea to keep an extra inner cannula with you in case you need to replace the other one.

Most people don't have any problems with their trach, but if you ever have trouble breathing, remove the inner cannula.

If that helps you breathe more easily, replace that inner cannula with your extra cannula.

And then repeat the cleaning directions for the inner cannula.

There may be mucus in the tube.

If you're having severe trouble breathing or if your trach tube falls out and you can't get it back in, get emergency help right away.

Call your doctor if you have trouble breathing after suctioning; if the mucus and secretions from your trach tube change, such as looking brown or bloody; or if the skin around your stoma shows signs of infection, like increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness; red streaks leading from the trach; or pus draining from the trach.

Suctioning and cleaning your trach will help you continue to breathe easily and could help you avoid problems.

Most people who have trachs find that this all becomes easier to do after just a little time and practice.

And if you have any concerns, you can always talk with your care provider.

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