

# Tracheostomy Home Care for Adults

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University of Iowa Health Care  
Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery



# Table of Contents

<b>My Personal Record</b> .....	Page 5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	Page 7
<b>What is a tracheostomy?</b> .....	Page 7
<b>What is a tracheostomy tube?</b> .....	Page 7
<b>How do I take care of my tracheostomy tube?</b> .....	Page 8
Changing or replacing your tracheostomy tube.....	Page 8
Cleaning your tracheostomy tube.....	Page 9
Cleaning the inner cannula.....	Page 10
Using a cork.....	Page 10
<b>How do I take care of my tracheostomy?</b> .....	Page 11
Preventing infection with clean hands and supplies .....	Page 11
Taking care of your skin around the tracheostomy .....	Page 11
Changing your tracheostomy ties.....	Page 12
Humidification .....	Page 13
Other ways to keep secretions thin and loose .....	Page 14
Using saline solution.....	Page 15
<b>How do I suction my tracheostomy tube?</b> .....	Page 16
<b>What supplies will I need at home?</b> .....	Page 18
<b>What should I know before I leave the hospital?</b> .....	Page 19
<b>How can I stay safe with my tracheostomy?</b> .....	Page 19
<b>What if I have problems with my tracheostomy tube or breathing?</b> .....	Page 20
<b>How can I be ready for an emergency?</b> .....	Page 21
Emergency bag supplies .....	Page 21
<b>Weekly Cares</b> .....	Page 22



## My Personal Record

I have a tracheostomy because: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of tube: \_\_\_\_\_ Size of tube: \_\_\_\_\_

Jackson or plain



Uncuffed Shiley™



Cuffed Shiley™



Size of suction catheter: \_\_\_\_\_

**Call 911 if you have an emergency.**

**Call UI Health Care at:**

- 319 – 356 – 0345 Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Ask to talk with the otolaryngology triage nurse.
- 1 – 800 – 777 – 8442 on nights, weekends, and holidays  
Ask to talk with the otolaryngologist on call.

My UI Health Care doctor's name is: \_\_\_\_\_

Other emergency phone numbers are:

\_\_\_\_\_

My local doctor's name and phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_

My medical supply company name and phone number is:

\_\_\_\_\_

My visiting nurse agency name and phone number is:

\_\_\_\_\_

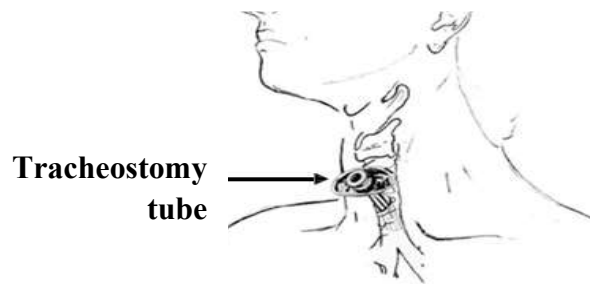


## Introduction

Your care team is sending you home with a tracheostomy tube. You, and a family member or friend, will learn how to take care of it.

## What is a tracheostomy?

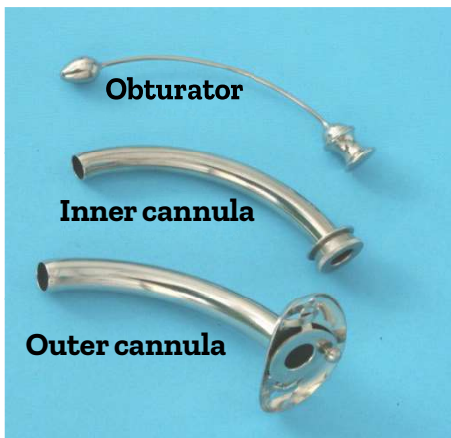
It is a stoma (a small opening) made in the trachea (your windpipe). A tracheostomy tube is put into your trachea to help you breathe.



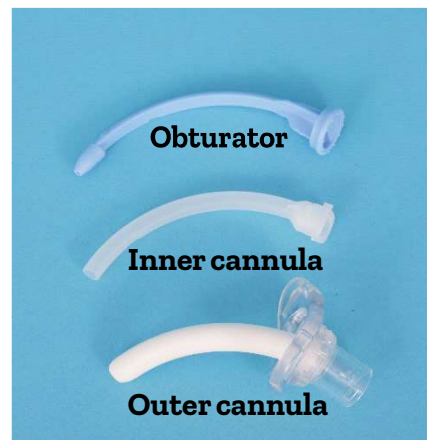
## What is a tracheostomy tube?

It is a curved tube that is put into the stoma (a small opening) in your trachea (your windpipe). Most tracheostomy tubes have 3 parts:

1. The **obturator** guides the tracheostomy tube into your trachea before it is quickly taken out.
2. The **outer cannula** keeps your trachea open.
3. The **inner cannula** is put inside the outer cannula. It can be taken out, cleaned, and put back in.



Metal tracheostomy tube



Plastic tracheostomy tube

**You must always have the obturator ready to use right away if your tracheostomy tube needs to be changed. Always have the obturator with you.**

## How do I take care of my tracheostomy tube?

### Changing or replacing your tracheostomy tube

An extra tracheostomy tube will be sent home with you. Do these steps if your tracheostomy tube comes out or if you have been asked to change it. If you were asked to change your tracheostomy tube, change it **1** time each week.

1. Have somebody help.
2. Get the clean tube ready.
  - Put the ties into the openings in the neck plate.
  - Put the obturator inside the outer cannula.
3. Put a few drops of tap water or water-soluble lubricating jelly on the lower part of the tube.
4. Hold your dirty tracheostomy tube in place as you loosen or remove the ties.
5. Take a deep breath before taking out the dirty tracheostomy tube.
6. Put the clean tracheostomy tube in gently with a back and down motion.
  - You may need to tip your head back a little bit.
7. Take the obturator out of the outer cannula.
8. Take a breath.
9. Secure the tracheostomy ties.
10. Put the inner cannula into the outer cannula and lock it into place.



**Put the tracheostomy tube in with the obturator.**



**Take out the obturator.**



## Cleaning your tracheostomy tube

Plastic and metal tubes may be cleaned with mild soap and clean tap water. Hydrogen peroxide may be used to clean plastic or stainless-steel tubes. Do **not** use hydrogen peroxide with sterling-silver tracheostomy tubes.

If the tracheostomy tube is cuffed, clean the cuff using the manufacturer's instructions found in the package. The cuff should **not** touch any cleaning detergents or chemicals.

### You need these supplies:

- Clean tap water
- Mild soap
- or
- Hydrogen peroxide (**do not use this with sterling-silver tracheostomy tubes**)
- Pipe cleaners
- Gauze sponges

### To clean

1. Put the dirty tracheostomy tube, obturator, and ties in a clean container.
2. Add clean tap water and mild soap or hydrogen peroxide (depends on what your tube is made of, such as plastic or metal) to the container.
  - The tube, obturator, and ties must be covered.
  - If you are using hydrogen peroxide, fill the container with equal parts hydrogen peroxide and water (such as 1 cup water and 1 cup hydrogen peroxide).
3. Soak them for a few minutes to loosen any secretions.
4. Clean the tube and other parts using pipe cleaners and gauze sponges. Put the pipe cleaner through the tube to get rid of all the secretions.
5. Rinse well with clean tap water to get rid of all the soap or hydrogen peroxide.
6. Make sure the secretions and lint from the pipe cleaners are removed.

### To clean, continued:

7. Put the tracheostomy tube parts on a clean towel in a safe place. **Let them air dry all the way.** It will take about 2 to 3 hours.
  - **Note:** Have an extra tracheostomy tube ready for use while the newly-cleaned tube dries.
8. When the tracheostomy tube is dry, look for cracks, a change in color, and any foul or bad odor. The tube needs to be replaced if you find any of these.
9. Get the tube ready to be used again by adding ties and putting the obturator in the tube.
10. Place all the parts in a closed, clean container. Always keep this with you.

## Cleaning the inner cannula

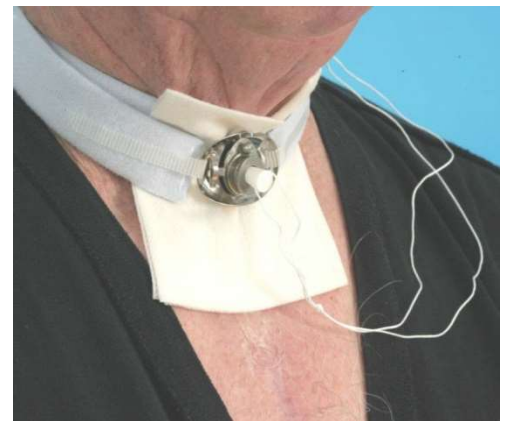
You need to clean the inner cannula so it does not get plugged.

1. Unlock it by turning it until you get to the notch. Then slide it out.
2. Use a small brush or pipe cleaners to clean it.
3. Rinse it under cool running water.
4. Look through the inner cannula to make sure it is clean.
5. Shake it or use dry pipe cleaners to get rid of any moisture or wetness.
6. Put it back in and lock it into place.

## Using a cork

Some people can cork their tracheostomy tube. To do this:

1. Tie the cork string to the ties around your neck.
2. Place the cork into the breathing hole in your tracheostomy tube.
  - Take the cork out if you have trouble breathing or need to cough out secretions.
  - Take the cork out when cleaning your inner cannula. This gets rid of any secretions in the inner cannula.



**Cork in tracheostomy tube**

## How do I take care of my tracheostomy?

### Preventing infection with clean hands and supplies

- **Wash your hands.**
  - Always wash your hands before and after any tracheostomy cares.
- **Keep your neck clean and dry.**
  - Change the gauze and tracheostomy ties when they are wet or dirty.
- **Keep your mouth clean.**
  - Saliva (spit) and secretions have germs that cause infection if they get into your airway.
  - Brush your teeth 2 or more times a day.
- **Clean your tracheostomy equipment.**
  - Your medical supply company will teach you how to clean your equipment.
- **Keep all hands clean.**
  - Each person that comes into your home should wash their hands with soap and water.

### Taking care of your skin around the tracheostomy

Keep the skin around your stoma (neck opening) clean and dry. This will help prevent irritation and infection caused by secretions. Skin should not have sores, redness, drainage, or odor (bad smell). Clean your skin around the stoma with soap and water at least 2 times a day. Clean more often if there is drainage.

#### **You need these supplies:**

- Cotton-tipped applicator or washcloth
- Liquid soap
- Clean tap water

## To clean

1. Get the cotton-tipped applicator or washcloth wet with soapy tap water.
2. Clean the stoma and exposed outer cannula using a rolling motion to get rid of any drainage from your skin and outer cannula.
3. Rinse the stoma and exposed outer cannula with a wet cotton-tipped applicator or wet washcloth.
4. Dry your skin and exposed outer cannula with a dry cotton-tipped applicator or dry washcloth.
5. Put gauze under the ties next to your skin if you would like.
  - Hold your tracheostomy tube while changing the gauze.
  - Change the gauze if it becomes damp or dirty.

## Changing your tracheostomy ties

Change the ties when they are damp or dirty. Change the ties if they stretch out or become too loose. Have somebody help you change them.

Different ties can be used to hold the tracheostomy tube in place, such as twill tape, bias tape, or Velcro®-like tube holders. **The clean ties need to be in place before the dirty ties are removed.**

### Twill tape or bias tape

1. Cut a piece of tape about 30 inches long.
2. Put the tie through one of the openings in the neck plate.
3. Bring the tie around to the other side of your neck.
4. Put the same end through the other side of the neck plate.
5. Tie 3 knots at the side of your neck.
6. Make sure the new ties are not too tight or too loose.
  - You should be able to put 1 finger under the ties, as in the photo.
7. Take off the old ties.



## Velcro®-like tube holder

1. Remove 1 tie from the neck plate.
2. Put the tip of the slit end of the Velcro®-like tie through the opening in the neck plate.
3. Fasten the Velcro®-like tie tightly.
4. Do this again on the other side.
5. Secure the Velcro®-like ties at the back of your neck.
6. Make sure the new ties are not too tight or too loose.
  - You should be able to put 1 finger under the ties, as in the photo.



**Velcro®-like tube holder**

## Humidification

When people do not have a tracheostomy tube, their nose and mouth warm and humidify (moisten) the air they breathe. When you have a tracheostomy tube, the air no longer goes through your nose or mouth. This means the air you breathe is not moistened. You will need to add extra moisture to your airway so your secretions can be removed by suctioning or coughing.

Get moisture by:

- Using humidifiers.
- Drinking plenty of fluids.

You will need more humidity when:

- It is winter and your home is dry.
- Your secretions are thick, dry, or crusty.
- Your secretions are pink or have a little bit of blood in them.

Put an ultrasonic nebulizer or cool-mist humidifier where you sleep. This helps keep the air moist.

## Heat moisture exchanger (HME)

Some people do well with a heat moisture exchanger device. This fits over the tracheostomy tube and helps trap moisture.



**Heat moisture exchanger**

### Humidifier care: each day

1. Empty and clean the humidifier tub with hot, soapy water.
2. Rinse well.
3. Fill with fresh tap water.
  - Never add water to the humidifier without cleaning the tub.

### Humidifier care: each week

1. Empty the humidifier tub and rinse well.
2. Fill the humidifier tub with equal parts vinegar and water (such as 1 cup vinegar and 1 cup water, 2 cups vinegar and 2 cups water).
3. Turn the humidifier on for 1 hour.
  - Place the humidifier in an empty room. The vinegar has a strong smell.
4. Empty the humidifier tub and wash all the parts with hot, soapy water.
5. Rinse well.
6. Fill the humidifier tub with clean water and turn it on for 1 more hour.
7. Empty the humidifier tub and let it air dry.
8. Fill the humidifier tub with fresh tap water when you are ready to use.

### Other ways to keep secretions thin and loose

- Fill your bathtub with hot water. Sit in the steam-filled bathroom for 20 minutes.
- Stand in the shower with water pointed away from your tracheostomy tube.
- Fill a spray bottle with new saline solution. Spray the saline solution into your tracheostomy tube a few times each day.

## Using saline solution

Saline solution is made with salt and water.

### Get a container ready to store the saline solution:

1. Wash the container and cap in hot, soapy water.  
or  
Place the open container and cap in the dishwasher on the hottest and longest running cycle.
2. Fill the container with boiling water.
3. Let it sit for 5 minutes.
  - o Do **not** touch the inside of the container or cap.
4. Dump the water out.
5. Fill it with the saline solution.

### Make saline solution:

1. Boil a quart (4 cups) of water for 5 minutes.
2. Add 1 ½ teaspoons (tsp) of **non-iodized** salt to the water.
3. Pour the mixture into the clean container and cover with the cap.
4. Let the saline solution cool to room temperature before using.

### Throw away the saline solution after 24 hours because germs may grow.

Putting saline solution into your tracheostomy tube will make you cough up secretions. This will help you breathe better.

### You need these supplies:

- Saline solution
- Syringe
- Clean cup
- Strong paper towel or gauze sponge
  - o Do **not** use facial tissues.

### Putting saline solution into your tracheostomy tube:

1. Pour 2 to 3 tablespoons (Tbs) of the saline solution into a clean cup.
2. Draw up 2 to 3 milliliters (mL) of saline solution into a syringe.
3. While taking a deep breath, put the saline solution into your tracheostomy tube.
4. Cough while you cover your tracheostomy tube with a strong paper towel or gauze sponge.
5. Do this again until your airway is clear and your breathing is not gurgling.
  - You may need to use suction if you cannot cough out your secretions.

Wash the cup and syringe with hot, soapy water each day. Rinse them well and let them air dry.

Use the saline solution more often when your secretions are thick and dry.

### How do I suction my tracheostomy tube?

Suctioning gets rid of secretions that you cannot cough out or clear from your airway. It keeps your airway open and helps you breathe better.

#### You need these supplies:

- Suction catheter (**keep the package**)
- Connection tubing
- Suction machine
- Clean tap water



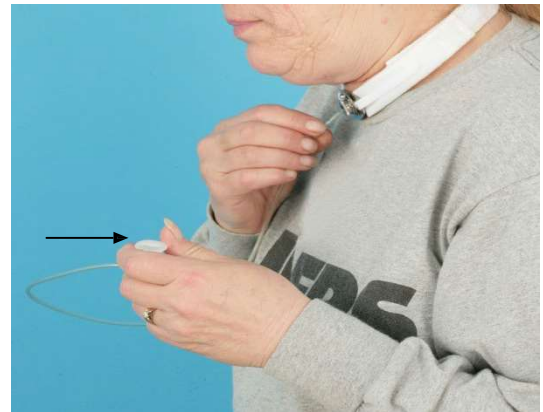
**Suction catheter**



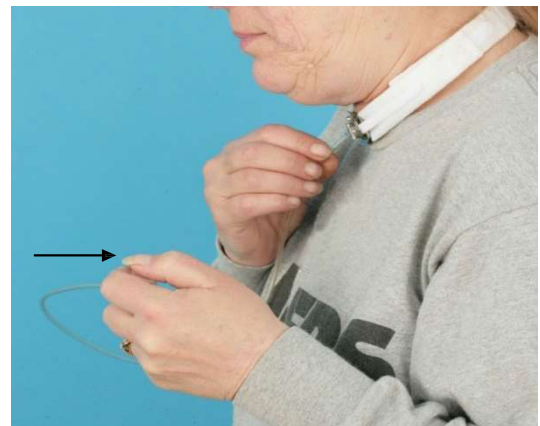


**To suction:**

1. Turn on the suction machine with the pressure set on the low-to-medium setting.
2. Connect the suction catheter to the tubing on the suction machine.
3. Dip the suction catheter tip into the clean tap water.
4. Take 4 to 5 deep breaths.
5. Gently put the suction catheter into your tracheostomy tube as far as you can without forcing it.
  - Do **not** cover the suction control vent with your thumb while putting the catheter into your tracheostomy tube.
6. Pull the suction catheter back out a little bit before you start to suction.
7. Cover the suction control vent with your thumb to start suctioning. Do **not** suction for more than 10 seconds each time. Turn or twist the suction catheter as it is taken out.
  - Take your thumb off the suction control vent if you feel the catheter pull during suctioning.
  - Wait 20 to 30 seconds between each suction try. After 3 tries, wait 5 to 10 minutes before suctioning again.



**Put the suction catheter into the tracheostomy tube.**



**Cover the suction control vent with your thumb to start**

## Cleaning and storing suction supplies

- Rinse the suction catheter and connection tubing with clean tap water after each use.
- Store the catheter in the original package until the next use.
- Do **not** reuse the catheter if it touches anything else.
- 1 suction catheter can be used for as long as your medical supply company tells you, unless you have an infection.
  - If you have an infection, use a new suction catheter each time you suction.
- The suction machine needs to be kept clean. Empty and clean the bottle and tubing with hot, soapy water each day. Always rinse with clean tap water and let it air dry.

## What supplies will I need at home?

You will be sent home with:

- 1 quart of saline solution
- 2 syringes (5 mL each) for use with the saline solution
- 2 containers to store the saline solution
- 1 pack of gauze squares to use for coughing. You can also use strong paper towels.
- 1 extra tracheostomy tube
- 2 tracheostomy dressings
- Tracheostomy ties
- Tracheostomy cleaning set with a basin, brushes, cotton-tipped applicator, and pipe cleaners
- 2 suction catheters and tubing for your suction machine (if not supplied by your medical supply company)



**Velcro®-like ties**



## What should I know before I leave the hospital?

- A visiting nurse may be arranged to help you when you go home.
  - Your visiting nurse can help with your tracheostomy care and help you get more supplies when needed.
- Buy your supplies from a drugstore or medical supply company.
- Have a humidifier at home.

## How can I stay safe with my tracheostomy?

- Keep water out of your tracheostomy tube when you are bathing or showering. **Do not swim.**
- Do **not** use powders, aerosol sprays, strong cleaning liquids, or facial tissues (due to lint).
- Stay away from dust, sand, and cigarette and other smoke.
- Cover your tracheostomy tube with a scarf or HME if:
  - You are in cold weather.
  - It is windy.
  - You will be near sand or dust.
- Do **not** use over-the-counter cold medicines. These dry secretions and your airway.
- Check your tracheostomy ties often. Make sure they are tight. You should be able to slip 1 finger under the ties.
- Keep the tracheostomy site uncovered as much as possible. You need to see that the tracheostomy tube is in place.
- If the tracheostomy tube comes out, slide it back in and tighten the ties.
- If the tracheostomy tube is all the way out, put in the spare tracheostomy tube.
  - Always have an extra tracheostomy tube ready.
- Drink plenty of fluids and have enough humidity to keep your secretions thin and loose.

- Suction often and deep enough to keep your tracheostomy tube clear of secretions.
- Change your tracheostomy tube 1 time each week.
- If you cannot breathe through the tracheostomy tube:
  1. Take out the inner cannula.
  2. Clean the inner cannula.
  3. Put the inner cannula back in.
  4. If you still cannot breathe, put saline solution in your tracheostomy tube to cause a cough.
  5. Try to suction.
  6. If you still cannot breathe, put in the spare tracheostomy tube.

**Call 911 if the tracheostomy tube cannot be put back in.**

## **What if I have problems with my tracheostomy tube or have trouble breathing?**

### **Call your care team if you have:**

- Trouble breathing or have noisy breathing (congestion)
- Dry, crusted secretions (mucus plugs) or blood-colored secretions from your tracheostomy tube
- More secretions or drainage than normal from your tracheostomy tube or stoma site
- Thick, bad-smelling, yellow or green secretions
- Chest pain
- Trouble putting your tracheostomy tube in because your stoma size has gotten smaller
- A temperature of 101 °F (38.3 °C) or higher
- Redness, skin breakdown, or swelling around your tracheostomy stoma
- Bleeding around your tracheostomy site
- Trouble swallowing or eating

## How can I be ready for an emergency?

- Talking on the phone may be hard. Post these near your phone:
  - Emergency and other important phone numbers
  - Your name
  - Your address
- Know emergency phone numbers wherever you are.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet or necklace or both. Get these from a pharmacy. They let people know that you breathe through a tracheostomy tube. The tracheostomy tube should be used as your airway if you need oxygen or CPR.
- Keep a bag with emergency tracheostomy supplies with you at all times.



**Medical alert bracelet**

### **Emergency tracheostomy bag supplies:**

Put these items in a to-go bag to have ready at all times:

- Extra tracheostomy tube (the same size you are using) with ties on and obturator in place
- Suction catheters
- Water-soluble lubricating jelly and normal saline
- Emergency phone list that is given to you by your care team

## Weekly cares

I last changed my tracheostomy tube on:

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>

### Notes and questions:

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**Call 911 if you have an emergency.**

**Keep your emergency tracheostomy bag with you at all times.**