

How to suction a trach

A tracheostomy (trach) provides an airway that bypasses the nose, mouth, and throat. The trach tube helps the medical team manage your child's airway for an extended period of time.

Mucus is produced by the lungs. Mucus cleans the air we breathe by trapping small particles such as dust and bacteria. Mucus collects in and around the trach tube. Some children can cough up the mucus, but they often require suctioning to help remove the mucus from the airway. If mucus is not removed from the airway, it can dry and block the trach tube making it hard to breathe. Encourage your child to cough and breathe deeply. These exercises can help your child clear the airway of mucus.

Signs that your child might need suctioning

- Increased gurgling or coughing
- Mucus bubbling inside the tube
- Anxious or crying
- Flaring nostrils
- Fast breathing
- Whistling noise from trach tube
- Skin pulls in around the ribs or collar bone (called retractions)
- Mouth, lips, and fingernails may be slightly blue or pale
- Appears to be struggling to breathe
- Does not want to eat or drink
- Tells you he needs suctioning

How often should I suction?

- Whenever your child is having any of the signs in the list above
- When your child wakes up in the morning
- Before meals
- Before bed at night
- Before changing the trach tube
- As needed, after the tube change

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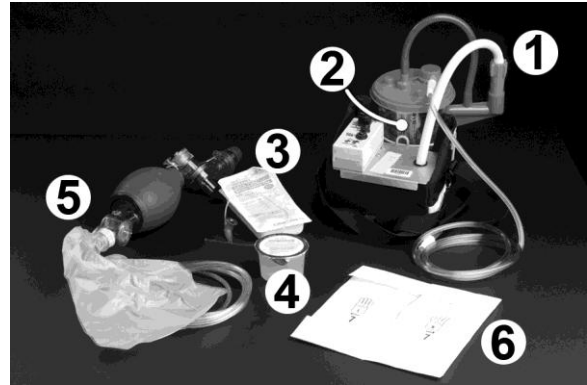
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Getting ready

- Wash your hands with soap and water. Dry them well. See “Do you know... Clean hands.”
- Gather your supplies onto a clean work area. Open each package ensuring that the contents remain sterile (germ free).

These are the supplies you need:

1. Suction machine with suction tubing attached
 2. Collection jar for mucus
 3. Sterile suction catheter size _____
 4. Sterile water packet (4 ounce cup)
 5. Resuscitation bag (optional)
 6. Sterile gloves _____ size
- Turn the suction machine on and set it between 60–80 mm Hg for infants (up to 24 months) and 80–120 mm Hg for children and teens.
 - Position your child in a way that is comfortable for him but that will not interfere with your suctioning.

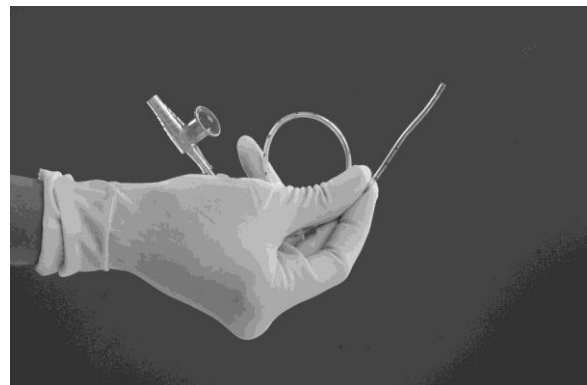


Suctioning

Suctioning from start to finish should take no longer than 5–10 seconds. Suctioning longer than 10 seconds can cause oxygen loss and collapse of all or part of the lung. Do not put any fluid down the trach tube during the suction process.

Follow these steps to suction your child’s trach tube:

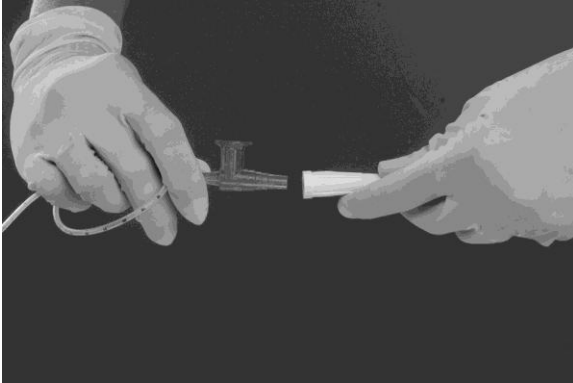
- Tell your child that you are ready to suction.
- Put on your gloves, following guidelines in “Do you know... How to put on sterile gloves.”
- Take hold of the suction catheter with the hand you usually write with (dominant hand). Be sure to keep this hand sterile by only touching the catheter. (See photo at right.)



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Do you know... continued

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- With your other hand, attach the tubing from the suction machine to the end of the catheter (photo left). Do not touch your sterile hand with anything except the catheter.

- Suction some sterile water into the catheter to make sure it is working and to lubricate the catheter. (See photo at right.) If a lubricant is used for suctioning, make sure it breaks down in water. Never use petroleum jelly as a lubricant for suctioning.
- If your child is on a ventilator, disconnect the ventilator tubing.



- *Optional step:* Some children require extra breaths with suctioning. This can be done using a resuscitation bag. Most children do not require this extra step, but if your child appears to have trouble breathing follow these steps:
 - Remove any visible mucus from the tip of the trach tube with the suction catheter.

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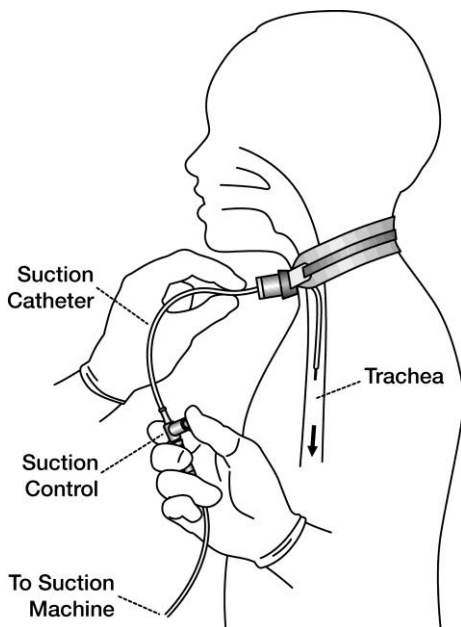
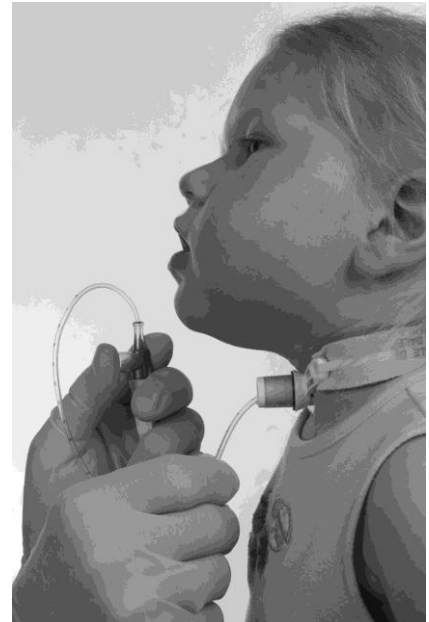
Do you know... *continued*

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- Attach the resuscitation bag, and give your child a couple of breaths (photo left). This will help loosen mucus and help your child to breathe.
- Then, follow the remaining steps for suctioning.

- Gently insert the catheter into the trach tube until it reaches the end. (See photo at right.) Then insert it a quarter inch further (illustration below). For your child, this is _____ cm. Your child may begin to cough.



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- Do not apply suction while inserting the catheter into the trach tube.
- Apply suction by covering the thumb hole (photo right). Slowly remove the catheter from the trach tube using a twisting motion (twirl the catheter between your thumb and index finger). Your child might keep coughing as you do this. Do not suction longer than 10 seconds.
- If your child is on a ventilator, reattach the ventilator tubing to the trach tube. Allow your child to have a few breaths and rest for 30 seconds or longer. If more suctioning is needed, follow the steps below.
- Rinse the catheter and suction machine tubing with sterile water by placing the catheter in the sterile water packet (cup). Apply suction, and pull some water into catheter to clear it.
- If your child needs more suctioning, repeat the steps above. Allow at least 30 seconds in between each suctioning.
- After you finish suctioning the trach tube, you may suction your child's mouth and nose with the catheter if needed. Do not reinsert the catheter into the trach tube after it has entered the mouth or nose.
- When finished, wash hands with soap and water, and dry well.



When am I finished suctioning?

- When your child appears comfortable
- When your child is no longer coughing
- When his skin color and fingernails are pink
- When your child is breathing with ease

What does the mucus look like?

- Normal: Clear to white with no odor.
- Infection: Yellow or green color with strong odor. Call your child's clinic or doctor right away.
- Blood: Blood may be pink to dark brown. Pink shows that some irritation may be occurring. Dark brown is a sign of old bleeding. Bright red is new blood, which could mean there is a problem. If your child is having any bleeding, call your clinic or doctor right away.

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What do I do if suctioning does not seem to be working?

If your child keeps coughing after suctioning and the mucus seems stuck, the trach tube might need to be changed. See “Do You Know... Changing the trach tube.”

What do I do with my supplies when I am done suctioning?

- Turn off the suction machine.
- Throw away your gloves and suction catheter in the regular trash. Pour the remaining sterile water in a sink.
- The suction canister and suction tubing may be cleaned with a vinegar and water mixture. The ratio should be 1 cup white vinegar to 1½ cups warm water. Make as much of this mixture as you need to soak the tubing and canister. Soak these items in the mixture for about 30 minutes.
- Rinse the canister and tubing with warm water after soaking them in the vinegar and water mixture. Place the items out to air dry fully.
- Replace suction machine tubing and suction canister as needed, but at least one (1) time each week.
- Wash hands.

Questions?

If you have questions or concerns about suctioning, talk to your child’s clinical nurse specialist.

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