

# **Oral Suctioning**

## **Information for caregivers**

Respiratory Services

This booklet tells you about how to do oral suctioning, the equipment used and how to take care of and clean the equipment. This booklet also tells you what problems to look out for and what to do if they come up.

Your nurse or respiratory therapist will help you to understand the information and how to do the care.

- Take your time.
- Write down any questions you might have.
- Talk to us about your concerns and ask questions.

We are here to help you and your family.

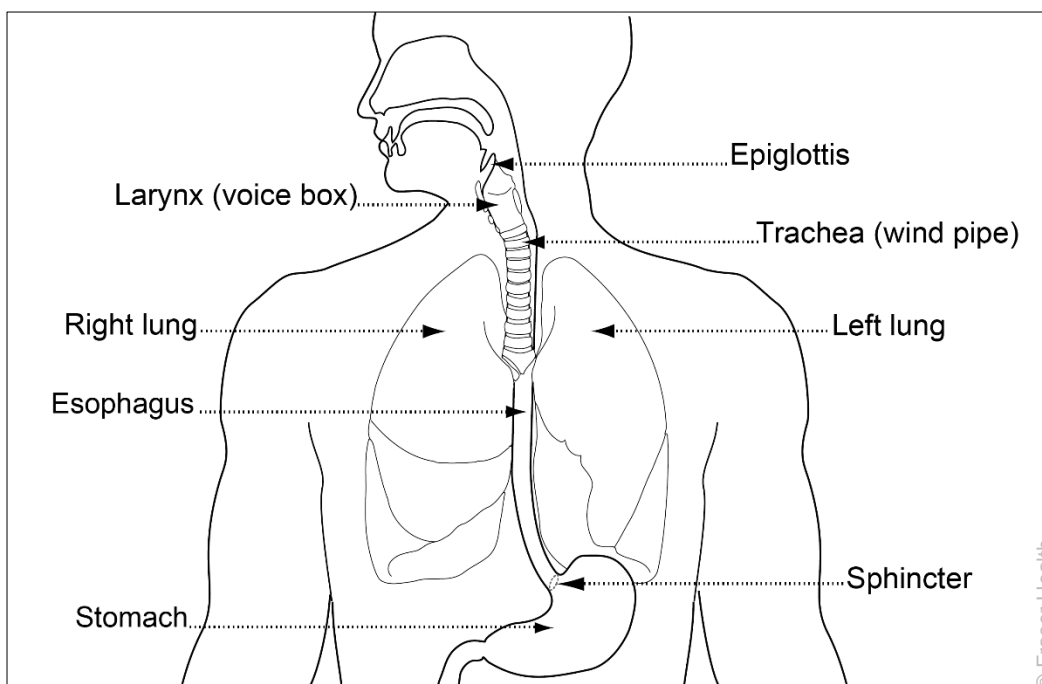
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## Words to Know

Aspiration (sounds like <i>ass-per-ray-shun</i> )	When foods or liquids accidentally go down the trachea into the lungs, rather than down the esophagus into the stomach
Epiglottis (sounds like <i>ep-ee-glot-tis</i> )	A flap in your windpipe that closes when you swallow to prevent food from entering your lungs
Esophagus (sounds like <i>ee-sof-fuh-gus</i> )	A hollow tube that connects your mouth and throat to your stomach  Your 'food tube'
Larynx (sounds like <i>lair-inks</i> )	Your voice box
Mucus	Produced by your windpipe. Normally thin in consistency and white or clear in colour
Oral Suctioning	Using a special machine and tube to suck up fluids from the mouth
Sphincter (sound like <i>ss-fink-ter</i> )	A ring of muscle that closes the opening between the esophagus and stomach
Sterilize	To make something completely free of bacteria
Trachea (sounds like <i>tray-key-yah</i> )	Commonly called the windpipe  How air gets in and out the lungs
Yankauer (sounds like <i>yawn-ker</i> )	A rigid, hollow tube used for sucking up fluids from the mouth



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## Oral Suctioning

### What is oral suctioning?

When a person breathes, they use their windpipe (trachea) to bring oxygen into their body. The windpipe is kept clear by reflexes such as sneezing, coughing, swallowing and gagging. These reflexes might be weaker or lost in people with chronic illnesses or disabilities.

For some people, they might also have a weak epiglottis or stomach sphincter. They are not able to keep stomach contents from coming back up into the mouth.

When fluids like mucous, spit (saliva) or stomach contents build up in the mouth, the windpipe can be blocked. Oral suctioning is the removal of these fluids from the mouth. You can do this by using a suction machine and a yankauer.

### Why do we do oral suctioning?

Fluids that build up in the mouth can block the windpipe. This can lead to problems with breathing or aspiration. If fluids get into the lungs (aspirated), they can cause infection, such as pneumonia. It is important to do oral suctioning to keep the person from having these problems.

Sometimes, doing oral suctioning can trigger the person to have a cough or sneeze. This can also help them get rid of some of the fluids that have built up.

### When do we do oral suctioning?

Check regularly to see if fluids have built up in the person's mouth. If they have, do oral suctioning. It is good to do a check if the person has not changed positions or has been lying down for a long time.

Examples of when the person in your care needs oral suctioning:

- You see fluids running down their face.
- You hear gurgling sounds when they breathe.
- They are asking for oral suctioning.
- They can't spit out after teeth brushing.
- Their lips or mouth is blue in colour.

If the person's lips or mouth stay blue even after suctioning, it might mean they are not getting enough oxygen. **This is an emergency.** Stop suctioning and **call 9-1-1.**

## Oral Suctioning Equipment

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Oral suctioning can be done using a plug-in or battery-powered suction machine. A long and flexible tube connects the machine to the yankauer. The machine works like a small vacuum. Fluids are sucked out of the mouth and collected in a container on the machine.

There are many kinds of suction machines. Although they might look different, each has these basic parts:

### **Power source**

Your suction machine can have an AC (household current), DC (12 volt battery, car lighter), or battery power source. It might also have a combination of these.

### **Collection container**

Each machine has a container that collects the fluids. This container can be taken apart from the machine and emptied. The machine can tell when it is too full, and it will not work unless you empty the container.

### **Suction tubing connector**

This is a place on the collection container where you can connect one end of the suction tubing.

### **Vacuum pressure**

This is a dial or knob that lets you choose how strong the suctioning is.

### **Battery charger**

Some machines are battery-powered and can be unplugged from the electrical outlet. If so, there will be a battery charger you can use to re-charge the machine.

Please read the manufacturer's instructions for your machine.

## How to do Oral Suctioning

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When done at home, oral suctioning is a clean procedure. This means you will have to keep the equipment clean and there is no need to sterilize it.

It is especially important to keep the tip of the yankauer clean. This keeps from passing germs to the person through the mouth when you do oral suctioning.

Use disposable gloves when you do oral suctioning. If the person coughs, turn your face away to protect yourself.

### Prepare the equipment

- Collect your supplies:
  - a suction machine
  - a connection tubing
  - a yankauer
  - a pair of disposable gloves
  - a container of sterile or distilled water
- Connect one end of the connection tubing to the suction machine.
- Connect the other end of the tubing to the yankauer.
- Check all the connections before you start.

The suctioning will not work if you have a loose connection. This includes having a lid on the collection container that is not closed properly.

Sterile water can be made at home by boiling water, then letting it cool. Distilled water can be bought at a pharmacy.



## Prepare the person

- Ask the person to cough if they are able to.  
Sometimes this can help the built up fluids come out enough that you can wipe them away with a tissue.
- Check to see if they still need oral suctioning. Continue to get ready for oral suctioning if there are still fluids in the mouth.
- Explain to the person what you are going to do.  
This will help calm and reassure them.
- Position the person so that they are facing you.  
Their head and neck should be well supported and in line with their body. They can be sitting or lying down in bed.
  - If they are sitting:  
Keep the head upright. There is no need to raise the chin. Having their mouth open and the chin down will help the fluids drain to the front of the mouth. This makes it easier to suction.
  - If they are lying down:  
Lay them on their left side. This lets the fluids drain out easier.

## Oral suctioning technique

- Wet the tip of the yankauer with sterile or distilled water.  
This makes it easier to slide the yankauer into and around the mouth. You can also check if your equipment is working by suctioning some water.
- Move the yankauer around the mouth, but keep it between the cheeks and teeth, or under the tongue. The yankauer should not be in the mouth for longer than 15 seconds at a time.
- Do not insert the yankauer further than 3.5 inches into the mouth.  
Putting the yankauer too far into the mouth, touching the back of the tongue or touching the back of the throat causes gagging. Gagging might lead to vomiting and aspiration
- Let the person rest for at least 4 to 5 breaths before you try again.

## Caring for the Equipment

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### Yankauers

- Suction up sterile or distilled water after each use to rinse the inside.
- Wipe thick fluids off the outside with a tissue.
- Rinse the outside with water.
- Let the yankauer air dry.
- Store the yankauer in a clean and dry container.
- Yankauers should be thrown away if:
  - it has fallen on the floor
  - it is too dirty or clogged and cannot be cleaned
  - it is cracked or not working properly
  - it has been used for one week
  - the person has a cold sore
  - the person has a respiratory infection. Use a new yankauer every time you suction until they are finished with their antibiotics.

### Collection container

Empty and clean the collection container after every oral suction.

- Disconnect the tubing from the collection container lid.
- Take the collection container off the machine.
- Empty the fluids from the container into the toilet and flush.
- Soak the container in a mixture of warm water, unscented dish soap and diluted vinegar (1/3 parts vinegar, 2/3 parts water) for 60 minutes.
- Rinse the container with tap water.
- Let the container air dry before you put it back on the machine.

### Suction Machine

- Keep the machine plugged in whenever you can.  
This way, it is always charged and ready for use. There is a battery in the machine so that you can take it with you when you go out with the person in your care.
- Turn off the machine and unplug it before cleaning.

## Putting the equipment back together

- Check the collection container, container lid, connectors and tubing for cracks.
- Reconnect the equipment using the machine manufacturer's instructions.
- Check that the machine is working by suctioning a small amount of water.

## Troubleshooting the equipment

Sometimes you might find that the suction machine is not working. Here are some checks you can do:

- Is the battery charged? Does the machine work when it's plugged in?
- Are the connections tight?  
Check each connection starting from the yankauer to the machine.
- Is the lid on the collection container closed properly?
- Does the collection container need emptying?
- Is the overflow valve stuck to the lid?
- Is the collection container cracked?
- Is the connector tube switched with the tube that provides suction to the collection bottle?

If the equipment stops working while you are suctioning, the suction tubing or yankauer might be blocked. Try changing them to a new one.

## Problems with Oral Suctioning

While suctioning, I notice:	What do I do?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- loud crowing sound with breathing (stridor)</li> <li>- neck muscles straining</li> <li>- skin tightening above the collarbone</li> <li>- hard work in breathing</li> <li>- pale or blue face</li> <li>- sweating</li> </ul>	<p><b>This is an emergency. Call an ambulance.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop suctioning</li> <li>• Move the person into a side-lying position</li> <li>• Keep the head and neck straight, in line with the body</li> </ul> <p>The person might have a swollen or blocked airway.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- large amount of blood from the mouth</li> </ul>	<p><b>This is an emergency. Call an ambulance.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop suctioning</li> <li>• Move the person into a side-lying position</li> <li>• Keep the head and neck straight, in line with the body</li> <li>• Let fluids and blood drain from the mouth. Place a pad or paper towels down to soak up the drainage.</li> <li>• Place any soaked pads or paper towels in a plastic bag. You can show this to the paramedics so they can check how much blood was lost.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- weakness</li> <li>- faintness</li> <li>- pale or blue lips and nails</li> <li>- restless or agitated behavior</li> </ul>	<p>This person might have low oxygen levels. This can happen if they are being suctioned for too long.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop suctioning</li> <li>• Watch closely. If what you notice does not go away or gets worse, call an ambulance.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- streaks of blood in the fluids</li> </ul>	<p>Small amounts of bleeding can happen if the inside of the mouth is irritated, injured or infected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check the suction pressure to make sure it is not too strong. Try a lower pressure.</li> <li>• If the bleeding continues, stop suctioning and tell the family doctor.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more fluids in the mouth than what is normal</li> <li>- smelly fluids</li> <li>- yellow or green fluids</li> <li>- fever 37.5 degrees or above</li> </ul>	<p>This might be an infection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wash your hands often.</li> <li>• Throw the yankauer away after each suctioning.</li> <li>• Call the family doctor and tell them what you noticed. The person might need antibiotics.</li> </ul>

While suctioning, I notice:	What do I do?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gagging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not touch the back of the tongue or back of the throat with the yankauer.</li> <li>• Do not insert the yankauer more than 3.5 inches into the mouth.</li> <li>• Keep the yankauer at the sides of the mouth, between the cheek and teeth, or under the tongue.</li> </ul> <p>Keeping the person from gagging can keep them from vomiting.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- vomiting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tilt the head forward so that vomit drains out of their mouth.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- secretions are thicker than normal and harder to suction</li> <li>- dry lips</li> </ul>	<p>Your person in care might not be getting enough fluids.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to give them more fluids (such as water or juice), unless restricted because of a medical condition.</li> <li>• Use a lip balm or moisturizer for dry lips.</li> </ul>

## **More Information**

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**Detailed DeVilbiss Suction Canister Cleaning Video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxlgSDkJtcU>

**DeVilbiss Cleaning Manual**

[https://www.cookchildrens.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/HomeHealth/Education/RespiratoryTherapy/Suction/CCHH\\_Suction\\_DeVilbissPortableSuctionGuide.pdf](https://www.cookchildrens.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/HomeHealth/Education/RespiratoryTherapy/Suction/CCHH_Suction_DeVilbissPortableSuctionGuide.pdf)

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