Living with a tracheostomy

Having a tracheostomy may affect your lifestyle in terms of activities and choices you previously enjoyed. However, it is possible to successfully adapt your daily living without being restricted unnecessarily by the tracheostomy. The following recommendations will provide you with practical suggestions and guidelines for adjusting to life at home with a tracheostomy.

Daily life

You will be given a large quantity of equipment and supplies to manage your tracheostomy at home. You will need to consider where and how to store these supplies. Keep spare tracheostomy tubes in a designated place both upstairs and downstairs. Ensure everyone in the household who is involved in the care of the tracheostomy knows where supplies are kept.

You will need to plan and organise your day-to-day lifestyle to incorporate your health needs. It is important to be aware of any activities which may be hazardous with a tracheostomy. The following suggestions can be helpful:

- Choose clothing with loose-fitting necks and front opening to allow easy access to the tracheostomy for care or suctioning.

- Commercial coverings/scarves/neckties are available to provide some protection from foreign substances or objects (for example: sand, dust, during haircut or shaving).

- Use a water shield for protection in the shower or bath to protect against water or toiletries entering the tube.

- Avoid swimming, as there will be a very high risk of water entering your tracheostomy tube.

- Avoid contact sports, as they could result in the tracheostomy tube moving out of position or falling out.

- If you are using Buchanan bibs, they can be laundered and reused up to three times. Tie a knot in the necktie each time the bib is washed to mark a record of its use.
Your environment

You may find that sudden changes in climate or environment (for example: cold dry atmosphere or central heating, high pollen count) can irritate the airway causing coughing or dry secretions. You may need to use a different form of humidification (for example, Swedish nose, nebulizer) to compensate for this.

The tracheostomy will bypass your normal filtering systems so you will be susceptible to common colds, viruses and influenza. These illnesses may increase the amount of mucous and secretions in your tracheostomy. Please discuss with your general practitioner (GP) whether a flu jab will be suitable.

Try to avoid smoky or polluted environments; smoky particles cannot be filtered by the tracheostomy and can cause increased secretion production.

Avoid substances such as powders or aerosols which, if inhaled, can cause airway/chest damage or infection, (for example: furniture polish/ hairspray). Talcum powder, if inhaled, will form ‘clumps’ within the airway.

Avoid contact with animals that have fine hair. Their hair can easily be inhaled via the stoma.

Let the local electricity board know of your health needs, as they will be able to let you know in advance of planned power cuts and place your home on an ‘at risk’ list to ensure priority electricity supply/reconnection.

What equipment do you need when you are away from home?

Always carry supplies required to change your tracheostomy tube. A small case or bag containing essential equipment will avoid any delay in the event of an emergency tube change.

The following items should be contained within the bag:

- One tracheostomy tube (of current size)
- One tracheostomy tube (one size smaller) for use in the event of being unable to insert tube
- Velcro collar or cotton tapes
- Scissors (if using cotton tapes)
- Pre-cut dressing
- Syringe (if tube is cuffed)
- Lubricating jelly
- Emergency contact details, for example GP, district nurse, local hospital, ENT ward, tracheostomy nurse (if available)
A fully charged portable suction unit with tubing and suction catheters should be accessible at all times.

For further information or advice please contact (Monday to Friday 09:00 - 16:00 hours):

Claudia Russell
Nurse Consultant in Tracheostomy Management
01223 256614

Claire Scase/ Emma Whattam
Tracheostomy Practitioner
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bleep 152/459

In case of emergency, please dial 999.

We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

Document history

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