Oral suction at home

This leaflet is written to guide people with motor neurone disease and their carers in carrying out oral suction at home. Oral suctioning may be necessary as swallowing becomes less effective. It is performed to remove excess secretions from the mouth to maintain comfort and oral hygiene.

Performing oral suction

Oral suction involves the insertion of a yankauer sucker (a small tube) into the mouth to remove sputum or saliva. This will be demonstrated to you by a health care professional.

The following method is recommended:

- Look at the machine and ensure all parts of the equipment are clean and intact.
- Wash your hands and ensure the person receiving suction is seated or lying comfortably.
- Attach the yankauer sucker to the suction tubing and switch on the machine.
- Set the pressure 80 - 200 mm/Hg by turning the operating knob.
- Insert the yankauer sucker gently into the mouth until it reaches the pouch of the cheek. Put your thumb over the vent to suck secretions. Gently sweep over the arch of the tongue to the pouch of the opposite cheek.
- Only apply suction through the yankauer for a short period of time (no longer than 10 seconds)
- Repeat again if necessary.
- Flush through the tubing with water after use.

Care of your machine

Tubing and yankauer suckers can be cleaned with soap and warm water as needed. It is suggested the yankauer sucker should be cleaned daily and kept covered when not in use. Tubing should be changed when discoloured. Yankauer suckers should be changed depending on frequency of use (weekly suggested).

Disposable supplies should be requested through your GP/ district nursing team. Your machine will be recalled for yearly servicing and filter change.

Ensure that the suction unit is kept on charge when not in use. If this is not possible ensure the unit has a full charge for a minimum of twenty four hours once a month.
Benefits

Oral suction can help manage secretions when the swallow and cough are less effective to help maintain comfort and minimise drooling. It is particularly important to maintain good oral hygiene when unable to eat and drink normally. Suction can be used to remove toothpaste and water from the mouth to maintain cleanliness and freshness.

Risks

It is important not to attempt to remove solid objects from the back of the throat as this may result in the object being forced down the throat.

The suction catheter (commonly known as a yankauer sucker) should not be in prolonged contact with the soft tissues of the mouth to reduce the risk of damage and discomfort.

Stop suctioning if gagging, bleeding or discomfort occurs.

Contacts

If you are concerned about any aspect of using the suction machine at home please contact the MND Care Centre on 01223 216631.

If you have concerns regarding the correct functioning of the machine please contact 01223 216716 between 09.00 – 17.30 Monday to Friday (answerphone).

This unit is provided as a comfort measure for people with motor neurone disease for oral secretion removal only. If the machine breaks down there is not a 24 hour maintenance and supply service.

Sources of evidence

Respiratory care vol.44. pp 99-104.
Laerdal Suction Unit – directions for use. Laerdal Medical AS Stavanger, Norway
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.

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Document history
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