

Preventing Tracheitis

What is Tracheitis?

The nose warms, moistens, and filters the air we breathe as the air travels into the lungs. If you have either a laryngectomy or tracheostomy, this system is by-passed. You may have trouble keeping your airways moist. This may cause a dry irritated airway known as tracheitis.

This handout is to help you prevent tracheitis, coughing spells, and thick secretions. Thick secretions are hard to cough up and could plug your airway.

If you live in a cold climate, you need to add humidity to the air. Heat sources can rob moisture from the air in your home making it harder to breathe.

Here are some ways to make sure you get enough humidity.

- Place a large capacity (9-10 gallon) room humidifier in the main living area. When prescribed by a doctor, some health insurance will pay for the humidifier. Check with your insurance company.
- Place a small vaporizer at the bedside to add moisture at night.
- Place shallow pans of water on top of the radiator at home. This is an easy and low-cost way to add moisture to room air.
- For newer home heating systems, change your built-in humidistat to 45-50%. Use a low-cost gauge to keep the level at 50%. These can be found at a hardware store.

- Make a steam-filled bathroom. This is most helpful for clearing thick secretions. Turn hot water on in the shower and close the bathroom door. Let the room fill with steam. Breathe in the moist air.
- Use a home “mist” machine or nebulizer. Some insurance cover the cost if prescribed by your doctor. You can get this machine from a medical supply vendor. Check with your insurance company.
- Protect the stoma or trach tube. Use gauze, a stoma cover, a crocheted bib, or other lint-free material. This helps humidify and warm the air that is breathed in.
- If you are a Total Laryngectomy patient wear your HME and change daily.

Over the counter products such as Ocean[®], Ayr[®] Saline Nasal Mist, and Salinex[®] can also be used. The tiny, pre-filled spray bottle can be carried in your pocket or purse and be refilled. It is a handy source of humidity. You may mist your trachea or stoma every 1–2 hours, if needed.

You can make normal saline at home by adding 2 teaspoons of salt to one quart of boiling water. Cool and store the saline in the refrigerator. Throw out any unused saline after 1 week.

Be sure to use the saline solution regularly. Living in colder climates may increase the need to use saline as often as every two hours. Drink plenty of liquids. By drinking 6-8 eight-ounce glasses of liquids a day, you can help keep the secretions thin.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©1/2019. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5317.