

Preventing Tracheitis

This handout explains ways to prevent tracheitis. Your nose and mouth warm, moisten, and clean the air before it reaches your lungs. After a laryngectomy or tracheostomy, it can be hard to keep your airway moist. If the airway dries out and becomes irritated, it can lead to tracheitis.

This can cause coughing and thick mucus to build up in the trachea. Thick mucus is hard to cough out and can block your airway. A blocked airway is dangerous and can threaten your life. Cold weather can make this worse. Heating systems dry out indoor air and make breathing harder, so adding moisture to the air in your home can help.

Ways to Increase Humidity

These steps help add moisture to the air your child breathes.

Humidifier: Put a big humidifier (holds 9-10 gallons) in your main living room. If your doctor says you need one, your health insurance might pay for it. Call your insurance company to check.

Vaporizer: Use a small vaporizer near the bed at night to keep the air moist while sleeping.

Pans: Set shallow pans of water on top of your home's radiator. This is a simple and cheap way to add moisture to your room.

Newer heating systems: If your home has a newer heating system, set the built-in humidistat to 45-50%. Use a low-cost gauge from a hardware store to check and keep humidity near 50%.

Bathroom steam: Fill your bathroom with steam to help clear thick mucus. Turn on the

hot shower, close the door, and let the steam build up. Breathe in the moist air.

Nebulizer: You can use a home mist machine or nebulizer. If your doctor prescribes it, your insurance might help pay for it. You can get one from a medical supply store. Call your insurance company to find out.

Protect your stoma or trach tube: Cover it with gauze, a stoma cover, a crocheted bib, or other clean, lint-free material. This helps warm and moisten the air you breathe, especially when you go outside in cold weather.

Over-the-counter products: You can use saline sprays like:

- Ocean[®]
- Ayr[®] Saline Nasal Mist
- Salinex[®]

Make sure to pick a saline-only product. Read the label before buying. The small spray bottles can be carried in your pocket or purse and refilled. You can mist your trachea or stoma every 1-2 hours if you need extra moisture.

Homemade Saline Recipe

Living in colder climates may increase the need to use saline as often as every two hours. You can make normal saline at home.

1. Boil 1 quart of water for 5 minutes. Let it cool to room temperature.
2. Add 1 ½ level teaspoons of non-iodized salt per quart of water.
3. Because germs can grow in the solution, discard unused homemade saline mix after 24 hours.

Other Ways to Prevent Tracheitis

These methods also help lower the risk of tracheitis.

Vaccines: Follow your providers guidance to stay up-to-date with your vaccines, especially influenza, COVID, and pneumococcal.

Take care of your equipment: Care for your tracheostomy or stoma every day as you were taught in the hospital. If you had a total laryngectomy, wear your HME and change it every day.

Prevent illness: Take steps to prevent respiratory infections. **Avoid** people who are sick.

Drink plenty of fluids: Drinking 6-8 8oz glasses of fluids every day can help keep your mucus thin.

When to Call

Call the clinic if you notice:

- Changes in your mucus, like blood, pus, or a green or yellow color
- A fever higher than 100.4°F on two readings, four hours apart

Call 911 if you:

- Have trouble breathing
- Have sudden, new, noisy breathing
- Have a bluish tint to lips or fingernails
- You cannot clear mucus from the trach/stoma

Who to Call

If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan. For a list of UW Health Clinics, visit

www.uwhealth.org/.