Daily Care for Your Child’s Tracheostomy

Your child has a tracheostomy, (tray-kee-AH-stuh-mee) to help him breathe. A tracheostomy is sometimes called a trach. You may feel afraid when you start to take care of your child. Remember that you are helping your child to breathe. It will become easier for you to care for your child with practice and these instructions.

Parent-child relationship

- Your child like a normal child and is not ill.
- It helps to explain this to friends, family and anyone who will be in contact with your child.

Infant Feeding

- Your baby can be fed like any other baby.
- Make sure you have instructions about what your baby can eat.
- It is a good idea to suction before a feeding.
- While breast feeding or bottle feeding your baby, be careful not to let the formula drip into the trach. You can put a bib without a plastic liner to prevent this.
- Be sure to burp your baby well and place them on their belly or on his right side after feeding.
- Do not let your baby have a bottle unless an adult is right there, in case choking occurs. Never prop your baby’s bottle.
- Wait 30-60 minutes after feeding your baby to suction them, since coughing often happens while you suction your baby.
- Coughing can cause your baby to throw up their feeding.
- If you notice that your baby’s secretions become thicker, offer a bottle of water.
- Be sure your child is getting plenty of fluids.
- Giving fluids will help keep secretions thin so that they can be easily coughed up.

Child Feeding

- There are no diet limits for a child who has a trach. Be sure that small pieces of food do not fall into the trach because this is the airway.
- It is important for your child to have plenty of fluids each day. This will keep the secretions thin so that your child can easily cough them up.

If food or liquid is seen in the trach, suction the trach and mouth immediately. Then call your child’s provider for next steps.
Play
- Your child can take part in most play activities for their age.
- For an infant or small child, all small toy parts or objects need to be removed from the play area because they could be put into the trach and block the airway.
- Outdoor play is good, but you must protect the trach opening from extreme temperatures and dust or dirt in the air.
- Very cold or very hot air may irritate your child's lungs, making it hard for your child to breathe.
- An artificial nose works well to protect your child's trach and provide moisture if needed.
- Contact sports such as football and soccer should be avoided.
- Your child may go to the beach, as long as an artificial nose is worn to keep the sand out.
- Like all children, your child should be closely watched when in or near the water. Do not allow water to be splashed into your child's trach opening.
- Do not allow child to be submerged in water. Do not get water in the trach tube.

Communicating with your child
- At first, your child will not be able to talk to you. This is because the air from the lungs does not pass through the vocal cords.
- It is important that you talk to your child, read stories, and talk about pictures.
- Your child will learn to talk soon after the trach is in place.
- Speech therapy is important for all children with a tracheostomy.

How do I communicate with my infant?
- You may want to leave your child's door open during rest times.
- Use your apnea monitor if ordered by your provider.

How do I communicate with my child?
- An older child may use a passey-muir valve, or other speaking valve to assist with speaking.
- If your child cannot use a speaking valve, your child may be able to learn sign language to help communications.
- Your child's doctor or speech therapist may discuss speech therapy with you.
- Your child must have a way, if they are not able vocalize, to call for you when you are needed.

Some of the ways to communicate with your child are:
- Writing or a computer or an electronic devices could be helpful.
How do I bathe my child?
- You may bathe your child in the tub and wash their hair, but do not let water get into the trach.
- To wash an infant's hair, hold your child on his back over a sink or tub. Wash and rinse the hair using a cup of water or spray carefully.
- You may allow your child to play in the water, but never allow your child's trach to go below the water.
- Never leave any child alone in the tub.
- You need not stay with an older child but it is a good idea to stay close by to help if they needs help.
- **Avoid** powders and sprays. Particles and fumes from powders or sprays can get into the lungs through the trach. This can cause a burning feeling and breathing problems.

Is their special clothing or bedding I will need?
- You do not need to buy special clothes for your child.
- Keep your home as free from lint, dust and animal hair as you can.
- Do not allow anyone to smoke cigarettes, cigars, etc. around your child. Smoke will irritate your child's lungs.

Do I need to do anything special when my child is sleeping?
- You may feel concerned that your child might need suctioning during the night and you want to be able to hear them if they are having trouble breathing.

What can I do to know if my child needs me during sleep times?
- Many infants need an apnea monitor at home. An alarm will sound if your baby is having problems breathing.
- Check your baby right away to see if your child needs suctioning or other care.
- Tell your doctor or nurse if the alarm on the apnea monitor sounds often.
- An webcam, intercom, or monitor is another method you could use to know if your child is awake or having breathing problems.
- If your child is older, they can call for your help or come get you if they are having trouble problems breathing.

Does my child need the air to be kept moist?
- It is important to keep the air your child breathes moist.
- This is because the air your child breathes no longer goes through the nose, which is where the air gets its moisture.
How do I make the air moist?
Use a trach collar connected to a humidifier. Most children only use this during nap time and at night.

- An artificial nose can be worn over the trach when not on the trach collar. They are disposable and need to be changed after a total of 24 hours of use.
- The artificial nose MUST be removed when pt is asleep or unattended.
- The equipment company representative or Home Health nurse will teach you how to clean and store this equipment.

How do I take care of my child’s skin?

- Gently wash the skin around the trach with soap and water.
- Make sure you rinse the skin well with water.
- Gently pat the skin dry.
- Do this twice a day and more often if your child has a lot of secretions. Keep the skin around the trach clean and dry to prevent infection.
- **Be careful not to let water get into the trach.**
- If there is a rash, drainage, or unusual odor around the trach, call your child’s doctor.
- Check the trach ties often to make sure they are secure.
- Hold the trach in place as you check the ties. You should be able to get only 1 finger underneath the trach ties. If the ties are loose, change or tighten them.

- The trach ties may become dirty.
- Trach ties are to be changed daily.
- You will practice trach tie changes many times before you leave the hospital.
- If you see skin breakdown around the trach ties, use padding such as moleskin around the trach tie to decrease the rubbing.
What do I need to do if I travel with my child?
- The trach may become clogged or come out when you are shopping, riding in a car, or doing other normal activities.
- Always carry the following equipment with you when you are away from home.

What should I do if a babysitter will be taking care of my child?
- A child with a trach needs to be watched closely. Parents cannot do this alone. You need to have a break from doing all the care.
- Teach another person how to care for your child. The person must know how to suction a trach, change a trach, and how to do trach CPR.

What should I do if my child gets sick?
- Your child is just like any other child in that they can get the flu and colds or other illnesses.
- Make sure your child gets immunizations and well child checkups.
- When your child is sick, usually they may have more secretions and may need suctioning more often. Remember, if your child's secretions are thick, they need more fluids and may need to see their provider.

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What are signs that my child may be sick or have an infection?
Call the doctor if:

- Fever greater than 101° F.
- Coughing yellow or green mucus (secretions).
- Coughing blood in the mucus.
- Mucus changes from bad odor to a foul odor.
- A rash or drainage at the trach site.
- Bleeding at the trach site.
- Any respiratory distress, including increased work of breathing, retractions, oxygen desaturations <88% or any cyanosis.