



## **PATIENTS WITH TRACHEOSTOMIES**

The following information will help you learn to protect your stoma from airborne irritants and cold weather, the correct sneezing or coughing techniques; and why not use tissues near the stoma.

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### **PROTECTING YOUR STOMA**

Protect your stoma or trach with trach bibs to keep foreign material from being inhaled into your lungs. Avoid dust, smoke, aerosol sprays, perfumes, car exhaust fumes, powder, raking leaves or any other airborne particles. These particles may enter directly into your tracheostomy.

Wear a stoma covering to warm and filter the inspired air, especially in cold weather. A variety of clothing and accessories may be worn over the stoma. High neck sweaters, turtlenecks and scarves work well. They should fit loosely around the neck so that there is always easy access to the stoma and breathing is not obstructed.

Use a handkerchief to cover your tracheostomy, not your nose and mouth, when coughing or sneezing. Do not use tissues near the stoma because pieces may break off and enter the tracheostomy.

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### **PROPER HYGIENE**

Bacteria can easily enter the tracheostomy. To avoid infection, always wash your hands before touching your tracheostomy. Observe the stoma daily for any signs of redness, swelling or drainage.

Clean the skin around the stoma twice daily with normal saline or solution of ½ hydrogen peroxide and ½ water. Use a clean face cloth or fine mesh gauze (Nu Gauze). **DO NOT USE SOAP.** Gently pat dry.

If your tracheostomy tube has an inner cannula, clean it daily and as needed with a solution of equal parts of hydrogen peroxide and water. Rinse the cannula thoroughly under running water before re-inserting it.

Change the twill tape holding your tracheostomy in place when needed. Secure the new tape in place before removing the old tape.

A thin coat of a water soluble ointment, such as Aquaphor, (for patients receiving radiation treatment) may be applied to the skin around the stoma. **BE CAREFUL NOT TO LET ANYTHING ENTER THE STOMA.**

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## **ADJUSTING TO YOUR TRACHEOSTOMY**

Additional humidification of the air, especially during the winter, will help moisten secretions enough to be removed by coughing. Commercially available vaporizers or humidifiers may be used. The water in the vaporizer should be changed daily and the vaporizer cleaned with soapy water at least twice a week. Please follow directions of the particular vaporizer you are using. A pan of water kept on the stove could be used as an alternative. The water should be changed daily.

Staying well hydrated by drinking plenty of water will also help keep secretions thin.

When taking a bath or shower, stand on a non-slip bath mat because a fall could cause water to be splashed into your tracheostomy; showers are preferred.

When showering, adjust the shower head so that the water is directed to a level on your body below your tracheostomy. A well-wrung towel can be draped around the neck over the tracheostomy for further protection. Be sure to cover your tracheostomy with your hand or with a commercially available shower guard while rinsing your head.

While shaving or having a haircut, wear a protective covering and a towel over the stoma to prevent dust and hair particles from entering.

Avoid wearing clothing with small ornaments, such as sequins or small buttons, near the neckline. Women should avoid wearing necklaces with small individual parts (i.e., pearls).

Clean mouth and teeth at least three times a day. Use mouthwash often because your ability to detect mouth odor is lessened.

Purchase and wear a Medic Alert tag indicating that you have a tracheostomy and with instructions should the tracheostomy become obstructed or in the event of cardiopulmonary arrest.

No change in sleep habits is required. You will be able to breathe easily even with blankets covering your tracheostomy.

Please consult with your radiation oncology nurse for instructions on suctioning.

## **AFTER HOURS**

If you need immediate emergency medical attention, please dial 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. All other medical attention outside of the Center's regular office hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday) will be answered by our telephone answering service who will have a doctor from Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center return your call.

### TELEPHONE:

**Essen:** (225) 767-0847

**Woman's:** (225) 215-7100

**Gonzales:** (225) 664-1205

**Hammond:** (985) 542-5000

**Covington:** (985) 875-2234

**Houma:** (985) 876-9045

**Natchez:** (601) 442-1285