

What is oral suctioning?

- When a person breathes, they use their airway (trachea) to bring oxygen into their body. The airway is kept clear by reflexes such as sneezing, coughing, swallowing, and gagging. These reflexes may be weaker or lost in people with ALS or other motor neuron diseases.
- When fluid like mucous, spit (saliva), or stomach contents build up in the mouth, the airway can be blocked. Oral suctioning is the removal of these fluids from the mouth using a suction machine, a soft plastic tube and a Yankauer suction tip, which is made of rigid, minimally flexible plastic. The suction machine works like a “vacuum” to clear these fluids from the mouth and collect them in a removable container on the machine.

Why do we do oral suctioning?

- Fluids that build up in the mouth can block the airway or drain into the lungs. This can lead to breathing problems or aspiration. If fluid gets into the lungs (aspirated), it can cause infection, such as pneumonia. It is important to do oral suctioning to prevent these problems in a person with ALS or other motor neuron diseases.

When do we do oral suctioning?

- When a person has too much saliva in their mouth, and they have trouble spitting it out
- When fluids are running down a person’s face
- When there are gurgling sounds when a person breathes
- After brushing teeth, if the person is unable to spit
- After using a cough assist device to help clear secretions

Oral Suctioning Equipment

- Oral suctioning can be done using a plug-in or battery-powered suction machine. All suction machines have these basic parts: a power source, a collection container, a suction tubing connector, a vacuum pressure dial, and a battery charger. A suction machine may be provided to patients after an assessment by a Respiriologist in the ALS/Motor Neuron Disease Clinic. The suction machine can be obtained through the Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living (SAIL) Respiratory Benefits Program or Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program.
Be sure to read the manufacturer’s instructions for the provided suction machine.

Oral Suctioning Equipment

- When done at home, oral suctioning is a clean procedure. This means you will need to keep the equipment clean; there is no need to sterilize it. It is important to keep the tip of the Yankauer clean. This helps prevent germs from being passed to the person through the mouth when you do oral suctioning.



Preparing the Equipment

1. Collect your supplies:
 - Suction machine
 - Connection tubing
 - Yankauer suction tip
 - Container of sterile or distilled water
 - ✓ Sterile water can be made at home by boiling water, then letting it cool.
 - ✓ Distilled water can be bought at a pharmacy.
2. Connect one end of the connection tubing to the suction machine.
3. Connect the other end of the tubing to the Yankauer suction tip.
4. Check all the connections before you start.
5. Follow the product user manual for instructions on how to operate the suction device.

Oral Suctioning Technique

1. Wet the tip of the Yankauer with sterile or distilled water. This makes it easier to slide the Yankauer into and around the mouth.
2. Turn the machine on and set the vacuum regulator to 100 to 150mm Hg (AARC, 2010).
You can also check that the equipment is working by suctioning some water.
3. Move the Yankauer around the mouth but keep it between the cheeks and teeth or under the tongue.



ALERT: Do not insert the Yankauer more than 3.5 inches into the mouth. Putting the Yankauer too far into the mouth and touching the back of the tongue or throat can cause gagging. Gagging may lead to vomiting and aspiration.

Follow the product user manual for more information on the following:

- Cleaning Instructions
- Maintenance – **NOTE: Change all filters if overflow occurs or every two months, whichever comes first.**
- Troubleshooting

Additional supplies: Supplied through either the SAIL Respiratory Benefits Program or NIHB, depending on who provided the suction machine. An information handout on how to obtain supplies is provided with the suction machine.

CONTACTS

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References:

1. Cobbett S. L, Perry, A. G., Potter, P.A., et al, (Ed. Second Edition.) 2025
2. American Association for Respiratory Care (2010). AARC Clinical Practice Guidelines: Endotracheal suctioning of mechanically ventilated patients with artificial airways. *Respiratory Care*, 55(6), 758-764

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Oral Suctioning. Information for Caregivers. Fraser health*

