

# Suctioning the nose and mouth using a suction catheter



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## What is suctioning?

Suctioning is used to remove mucus from your child's airway. It involves placing a small catheter in the nose, mouth and back of the throat to pull mucus out and keep the airway clear.

**NOTE:** A tonsil tip (Yankauer) or bulb syringe may also be used to clear mucus from the nose or mouth. Ask your child's care team how to use them.

## When should I suction?

Help your child cough up mucus when possible. This helps keep extra mucus from collecting in the lungs.

It is best to suction your child before feeding when possible. This may help prevent them vomiting (throwing up).

You may need to suction your child when they:

- Have a cold and have extra mucus.
- Are not able to cough up mucus themselves.
- Have a congested-sounding cough.
- Think they need to be suctioned.
- Have anxiety or a scared look on their face, or they are overly irritable, restless or sleepy. This may mean they are not getting enough air to breathe well.
- Are not able to suck or feed like normal.

Suction your child **right away** if you notice any signs of breathing problems, such as:

- Trouble breathing
- Fast breathing
- Grunting
- Shortness of breath
- Retractions (pulling in of the skin between the ribs, below the ribs or in the neck when breathing)
- Flared nostrils
- Pale or blue color to the lips or changes in skin color

**If your child keeps having breathing problems, call 911 right away.**

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Suctioning, continued

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## What supplies do I need?

You will need these supplies:

- Suction machine and tubing
- Tonsil tip or bulb syringe if needed
- Correct size suction catheter for your child
- Water and container to rinse suction catheter
- Water soluble lubricant (such as K-Y Jelly) if needed
- Small saline containers if advised by the doctor
- Oxygen and resuscitator bag if needed

## How do I use a suction catheter?

### Before suctioning

1. Gather your supplies.
2. Place your child in bed or on their back with their head slightly raised.
3. If this is not an emergency, wash your hands well with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Put on non-sterile gloves if you have them.
4. Pick up the suction catheter in its paper wrapper with 1 hand. Use the other hand to hold the suction tubing. Attach the suction catheter to the suction machine tubing.
5. Turn on the machine. Make sure the pressure is set at the proper level for your child. This helps prevent injury to your child's airway.
6. Remove the suction catheter from the wrapper.

**NOTE:** If advised by your child's doctor, you may use saline in the nose first to loosen mucus. Only use saline if your child's doctor says it is OK. Ask your child's care team how to use saline and lubricant if needed.

### Suctioning your child (only when they need it)

1. Put the suction catheter into 1 side of your child's nose. Advance the catheter until you come to a blockage or your child begins to cough.
  - **Do not force the catheter.**
  - Do not use suction when putting the catheter into the nose or throat. This could damage the nose and throat tissue.
2. Place your thumb over the open port of the suction catheter, and pull back the catheter out of the nose.
  - Steps 1 and 2 should not take more than 10 seconds.
  - **Be sure your thumb is covering the port only when removing the catheter from the nose, not when entering the nose.** This helps decrease damage to the nose and throat tissue.
3. Do this again on the other side of the nose.

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# Suctioning, continued

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4. Repeat 2 to 3 times on each side until your child's airway is free of mucus. Give your child time to take several breaths between each suction.
5. If you need to suction both the nose and mouth, suction the nose first and then the mouth.

## After suctioning

1. Flush the suction catheter and tubing with water to clear them of mucus.
  - In the hospital, you may notice that your child's care team will only use a suction catheter 1 time and then throw it away.
  - At home, you will:
    - Clean suction catheters by washing them with hot, soapy water or by wiping the outside with rubbing alcohol or hydrogen peroxide. Ask your child's doctor or home health company which way to clean them.
    - Store suction catheters in a clean, dry place.
    - You may clean and reuse suction catheters for 24 hours. After this, throw them away.
2. If you use a tonsil tip:
  - Flush it well with water after each use.
  - Clean the tonsil tip in hot, soapy water. Rinse well, and let it dry.
  - Boil it in water for 20 minutes each day.
  - It may be reused until it becomes cracked, rough or broken.
3. If you use a bulb syringe:
  - Rinse it well with warm water after each use.
  - Clean the syringe each day with warm, soapy water. Rinse well, and let it dry.
4. Remove gloves if wearing them.
5. Wash your hands well again.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**