MND Association | For professionals

P9

Oral suction for Motor Neurone Disease

Motor Neurone Disease (MND) results from the progressive loss of motor neurones in the brain and spinal cord. These are the nerve cells that control movement. It leads to muscle weakness and can cause difficulties with movement, breathing, swallowing and speaking.

People with MND often experience problems dealing with saliva or mucus secretions, such as difficulties swallowing saliva or clearing secretions from the airways or the throat. The aspiration and accumulation of secretions can lead to increased risk of respiratory infections and impact quality of life. Oral suction is one of the strategies that can help manage these problems.

This publication is for health and social care professionals and provides information about oral suction machines used to remove secretions from the mouth.
It does not cover deep suction to remove secretions from the throat or airway, and it is not intended to offer clinical training or guidance on the procedure. Usually the professional who supplies the equipment should provide appropriate training on how to carry out oral suction. This includes training the person with MND and their carers.

1. **Using an oral suction unit**
2. **The oral suction procedure**

Information to share with people with or affected by MND:

Information sheet 7A – Swallowing difficulties
Information sheet 7B – Tube feeding

Information for professionals

Information sheet P3 – Managing saliva problems in MND
Information sheet P8 – Managing dysphagia in MND
Care pathway PG17 – Saliva management pathway for MND

See page 7 to order publications.

1. Using an oral suction unit

Weakness in the muscles involved in swallowing and breathing can result in a weak cough, impaired swallowing reflex and problems moving the tongue and mouth. These often cause issues swallowing saliva and clearing secretions, leading to their build-up. This increases the risk of:

- aspiration and blockages in the airway
- discomfort and anxiety about choking
- embarrassment due to saliva leaking from the mouth (sialorrhoea).

If a person is unable to clear secretions themselves, oral suction can help remove saliva, mucus or food particles from the mouth using a Yankauer suction catheter. A person with MND may use this equipment themselves if they have the strength in their upper limbs and the required manual dexterity. If they are not able to manage this, they will need support from a suitably trained family carer or care worker.

Consent

Always ask to the person with MND for their permission before performing oral suction. Make sure you inform them of what the procedure involves and that they can stop or withdraw consent at any point.

If the person is unable to speak, seek their consent in alternative ways or using their preferred communication methods. For example, they may blink, squeeze your hand or use a communication device. Agree also on a way to indicate whether they want to pause or stop the procedure.

The person's care team will advise whether suctioning is appropriate in cases where the person is unable to consent. If the person does not have the capacity to make the decision of having oral suction, and if it's not an emergency situation, the care team may need to make a best interests decision in line with the Mental Capacity Act (2005). It's essential to check whether a person has recorded an Advance Decision to Refuse Treatment (ADRT) or emergency healthcare plan and what treatments or interventions have been included.

Cautions

Oral suction should not be performed when there are:

- facial fractures
- loose teeth
- clotting disorders
- laryngeal or oral carcinoma
- severe bronchospasm (difficulty breathing, wheezing, whistling or sound when breathing in)
- stridor (harsh, grating abnormal creaking noise when breathing)
- restlessness or anxiety – be aware that the secretions and the suction procedure itself may cause some distress. Talk to the person if they have any concerns and be mindful that they might need some breaks during the procedure.

Equipment needed

Oral suction requires the following equipment:

- suction unit – ensure service due date has not passed
- filters/tubing/canister, within expiry date
- Yankauer suction tip (see the image below), within expiry date
- jug of water
- personal protective equipment (such as gloves, goggles and apron) for the person performing the procedure
- cleaning products (as specified in the manufacturer’s guidance).

2. The oral suction procedure

See the following advice if you are carrying out oral suction, and recommend it to carers or others who carry out the procedure:

- Seek advice from the professional who has provided the equipment, and follow the manufacturer's instructions. These should always be provided with the machine.
- Follow any procedures to avoid increasing the risk of infection. This includes washing your hands before the procedure and maintaining the equipment (see below). If a filter is included in the device, ensure it's clean and dry, and replace it, if necessary.
- An oral suction unit should only be used for suction from the front of the mouth (oral cavity). Do not put the Yankauer suction tip to the back of the person's throat, or further into the mouth than you can see. Do not pass it past the person's back teeth, to avoid stimulating gag or airway reflexes.
- If the person requires suction to remove secretions from the throat, this should only be carried out by a suitably trained professional. Information on this is not covered in this publication. Seek advice from the team who provided the unit, or the specialist MND team.
- Do not try to remove solid objects, food or an inhaled foreign body from the back of the mouth or throat. This could force the object further into the airway and cause an obstruction.
- Do not lay the person flat on their back. The respiratory physiotherapist or nurse can advise on positioning. If the person cannot sit up, they should lie on their side.
- Increase the vacuum dial slowly, and only as required for the person's needs. During your training, the appropriate professional will advise you on the setting to use to ensure pressure is appropriate and effective.
- Do not suction for longer than 10 seconds at a time.
- Try to avoid bringing the Yankauer suction tip into contact with the soft tissue on the inside of the mouth, to avoid damage. Suction with caution if there are any bleeding or sore gums.
- If the person experiences any vomiting, gagging, distress, increased breathing rate or difficulties in breathing, stop suctioning and seek advice from a specialist.
- If the person with MND is using continuous non-invasive or tracheostomy ventilation, the respiratory team should advise on suctioning procedures.

Maintaining the equipment

It's important to always follow the manufacturer's instructions to maintain and clean the equipment. These are some general tips that can help:

- The Yankauer suction tip and tubing should be cleaned after each use and washed daily by suctioning a small amount of clean water that has been boiled and cooled.
- Empty the canister regularly.

- Always make sure that the suction tip and tubing are within expiry date. They should be regularly replaced as instructed by the manufacturer.
- The suction unit battery should be regularly charged as instructed.
- If the machine breaks down or you have any concerns regarding the maintenance of the equipment, consult the professional who provided the machine.

Obtaining an oral suction unit

Suction units may be available via the person's GP, district nurse or community equipment services. In some areas, suction units are only available through the local MND care centre or network, or through the home ventilation service if the person uses non-invasive ventilation (NIV).

If statutory provision has been explored and is not available, it may be possible to apply for funding from the MND Association to rent or buy a suction unit. Ask the GP or district nurse to contact our Support Fund team (see page 6 or speak to your local MND care centre or network).

If the person with MND is at home, tubing and catheters may be available from the GP on prescription or via the district nurse. Alternatively, the local MND team can advise on the local arrangements for obtaining these consumables.

Bibliography

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How we can support you and your team

Our MND Connect helpline offers practical and emotional support, information and signposting to people with MND, carers, family and professionals. They can also provide further information about our services mentioned below.
Email: **mndconnect@mndassociation.org**
Tel: **0808 802 6262**

MND Association website

Our website offers supporting information on MND, our work, services, and how to get involved.
mndassociation.org/professionals

Stay updated on events, publications and opportunities for professionals.
mndassociation.org/educationupdate
X: **mndeducation**
Bluesky: **mndeducation.bsky.social**

Information resources

We produce high quality information for people with MND, carers, families and professionals, available in multiple formats and languages.
mndassociation.org/pro-info-finder
mndassociation.org/careinfofinder

Education

Our education programme aims to improve standards of care and quality of life. Opportunities include webinars and face to face equipment training.
mndassociation.org/education

MND Professionals' Community of Practice

A peer led group supporting cross disciplinary learning in MND care. Membership can contribute to CPD and offers access to networking and learning events.
mndassociation.org/cop

Local support

We offer online and local peer support, plus trained volunteers who provide practical help by phone, email or visits.
mndassociation.org/local-support

We fund and develop specialist care centres and networks across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, offering multidisciplinary care.
mndassociation.org/care-centres

Financial support

We offer a range of grants to support people living with MND, their families and unpaid carers. These are not in place of any statutory funding that should be available.
mndassociation.org/getting-support

MND register

The Register aims to collect information about everyone with MND in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to support care planning and research.
mndregister.ac.uk

Research into MND

We fund and promote research that leads to new understanding and treatments, and brings us closer to a cure for MND. We also produce information sheets on MND research for people with or affected by MND.
mndassociation.org/research

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We value your feedback

Your feedback helps improve our information for the benefit of people living with MND and those who care for them. Visit **smartsurvey.co.uk/s/mndprofessionals** or email your comments to education@mndassociation.org.

If you would like to help us by reviewing future versions of our information resources, please email us at education@mndassociation.org.

How to order our publications

Our publications are free for anyone with or affected by MND or Kennedy's disease, including professionals. Health and social care professionals can also order items on behalf of someone with or affected by MND or Kennedy's disease.

Download from **mndassociation.org/publications** or contact MND Connect to order hard copies. Call 0808 802 6262 or email mndconnect@mndassociation.org.

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Every day we support people affected by Motor Neurone Disease. Because with MND, every day matters.