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.

Many people with MND experience problems with saliva and swallowing, making eating and drinking difficult. This can lead to increased risk of respiratory infections. People with MND may feel anxious about choking on saliva, food, drink and medications.

This publication provides information on oral suction, and it is intended for use by health and social care professionals. People with MND and their carers or family members should be trained to carry out oral suction by the professional who supplies the equipment. For example, this may be a respiratory physiotherapist or nurse.

The information sheet covers:

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

ℹ **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

See page 7 to order publications.

1. Using an oral suction unit

A build-up of secretions may lead to an increased risk of:

- discomfort
- the airway becoming blocked
- aspiration
- embarrassment due to saliva leaking from the mouth.

Oral suction can help to remove saliva, mucus or food particles in the mouth.

This procedure involves inserting a Yankauer suction catheter into the mouth to remove saliva or mucus. It may be needed if a person is unable to clear secretions themselves, due to an impaired swallowing reflex, impaired tongue or mouth movements and/or weak cough.

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

If you intend using a suction machine with a person with MND, do not begin until you have their permission to do so. This may be sought using their preferred communication method.

The person's specialist team will advise whether suctioning is appropriate in cases where the person is unable to consent, but not carrying out the procedure would damage their health. A best interests decision in line with the Mental Capacity Act is needed if the person does not have the capacity to make the decision, unless it's an emergency situation. It is 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 where there are:

- facial fractures
- loose teeth
- clotting disorders
- laryngeal or oral carcinoma
- severe bronchospasm
- stridor
- restlessness/anxiety.

Equipment needed

Oral suction requires the following equipment:

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

2. The oral suction procedure

Recommend the following to the person carrying out oral suction:

- Seek advice from the professional who has provided the equipment if needed.
- Follow any procedures to avoid increasing the risk of infection.
- An oral suction unit should only be used for suction from 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 the Yankauer suction tip past the person's back teeth, to avoid stimulating gag or airway reflexes.
- 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, but if the person cannot sit up, they should lie on their side.
- Do not turn the vacuum dial too high. Start off on a low setting and increase slowly, and only as required for the person's needs. During your training, the appropriate professional will advise you on the setting to use.
- Do not perform suctioning in the mouth 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.
- If the person with MND is using continuous non-invasive or tracheostomy ventilation, the respiratory team should advise on suctioning procedures.

Maintaining the equipment

To maintain the equipment, the following steps should be followed:

- Suction a small amount of cold, clean water before and after each use.
- The Yankauer suction tip and tubing should be within expiry date and kept as clean as possible to prevent any build-up of bacteria that could lead to chest infections.
- Empty the canister regularly.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning the equipment after use.
- The suction unit battery should be regularly charged as instructed.

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 have a suction unit on loan from the MND Association. Ask the GP or district nurse to contact our Support Services team (see page 6 or speak to your local MND care centre or network).

If a suction unit is loaned from the MND Association, the local health authority or health and social care trust will need to make a small contribution towards carriage, maintenance and cleaning.

If the person with MND is at home, tubing and catheters should be available from the GP on prescription, or via the district nurse.

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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 8026262**

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

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following people for their valuable contributions to this information sheet, and earlier versions:

Anthony Hanratty	MND Advanced Nurse Specialist and Clinical Lead, Middlesbrough MND Care Centre
Ema Swingwood	Respiratory Pathway Lead/Physiotherapist, University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust

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 8026262 or email mndconnect@mndassociation.org.

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Registered Charity no. 294354

Created: March 2023
Next review: March 2026
Version: 2

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