

ORAL SUCTIONING

Purpose

The purpose of oral suctioning is to remove thick mucus and secretions from the mouth and oral cavity that a patient is not able to clear by swallowing. In addition, suctioning may be needed when a patient has a moist cough, is unable to effectively clear secretions from the throat and is having difficulty breathing, or they feel they cannot get enough air.

Because suction units provide vacuum pressures that are applied to body surfaces, clinical monitoring is required and they require a prescription to be dispensed. The suction unit and its supplies are being supplied in conjunction with the prescription we obtained from the patient's physician.

Always read and abide by all manufacturers' operating instructions. Suctioning is usually done when the patient wakes up in the morning and right before they go to bed in the evening. Suctioning is also done at any time when secretions build up in the oral cavity that cannot be swallowed. See the Oral & Respiratory Suction Unit Patient Education Sheet that describes the use of the suction unit.

Accessories

In addition to the suction unit, oral suctioning requires disposable suction tubing, a suction catheter, protective gloves, sterile water and a cup, and personal protection equipment.

The suction catheter used most commonly to clear oral secretions is called a tonsil tip, which is commonly referred to as a Yankauer (pronounced Yank-Hour) and is constructed of rigid plastic that has a hole or outlet that is closed during suctioning. Yankauer catheters are for single-patient use but are reusable. Yankauer catheters are only used for suctioning the oral cavity and should be cleaned between uses.

Use

The most important part of using the suction unit is to understand the suctioning procedure and follow it every time. There are no shortcuts when suctioning. Suctioning can either be a clean or sterile procedure. This education sheet will discuss the clean method. Follow the procedures in the Oral & Respiratory Suction Unit Patient Education Sheet as it pertains to the suction unit.

The suctioning procedure should be undertaken only when indications are clearly present. All caregivers should practice infection control procedures appropriate to the home environment. The person performing the suctioning may need to wear eye protection in order to protect any secretions from splashing in the eyes.

Wash your hands and connect the suction tubing to the collection canister. The hand that will hold the tonsil tip suction catheter should be protected with a clean disposable glove. The suction machine is turned on. Using the gloved hand, pick up the tonsil tip catheter and insert it into the end of the suction tubing. Kink the tubing and ensure that suction pressure is set to the prescribed level.

Use (Continued)

While holding the tonsil tip catheter with the gloved hand, place it into the patient's mouth and then cover the hole or outlet port with the thumb. The vacuum pressure is applied and the tonsil tip can be moved around to collect oral secretions.

Once the secretions have been removed, the tonsil tip catheter needs to be flushed with distilled water, followed by the suctioning of air to dry the internal surface. Turn off the suction unit when finished. The outer surface may be wiped with alcohol or hydrogen peroxide. The tonsil tip catheter should be allowed to air dry and then be stored in a clean, dry area. Always wash your hands after suctioning is complete.

Assessment

Results and observations related to suctioning should be recorded to inform and alert other caregivers. The suctioning procedure can be considered successful and the need for suctioning affirmed when the secretions are removed.

Safety

There can be many complications from suctioning. The patient should be monitored carefully during and after suctioning. If any adverse conditions occur during suctioning, the procedure should be stopped immediately. Tracheal suctioning requires it to be performed as instructed, which includes the following safety precautions:

- Always wear gloves when suctioning or handling secretions.
- Ensure that suction tubing is routed and secured so that it does not become entangled and/or damaged.
- Only apply vacuum pressure after entering the oral cavity.
- Never perform suction procedures without verifying suction pressure.