

HME (Heat Moisture Exchanger) for Tracheostomies

Patient Instructions for Home Use

A Heat Moisture Exchanger (HME) is one way to provide humidification to adult tracheostomy patients. Keeping the airway moist is important because it helps thin secretions so they can be coughed out. Other methods to provide moisture to the airway should be used when the HME is not in place. Refer to the UC Davis handout, “Tracheostomy discharge instructions and home care,” for more information.

Instructions for Use

- Be sure all connections and parts of the HME device work prior to use.
- Fit the HME device over your tracheostomy tube. The inner cannula should stay in place. Make sure the connection is secure.
- Remove the HME when you anticipate a cough. Cough any secretions out and replace the HME if not soiled.
- Check the HME often to see if it is soiled or clogged. It may be more difficult to breathe if secretions collect inside the HME.
- Replace the HME at least every 24 hours, or more often if clogged.

Oxygen

- Not all HMEs have oxygen ports. If you need oxygen your HME needs to have a special port.
- Oxygen up to 10 liters can connect to the oxygen port. Follow your doctor’s instructions for oxygen use.
- When disconnecting oxygen, remove the HME device from the tracheostomy tube first. Otherwise the entire tracheostomy tube can accidentally be pulled out.

Suction

- Remove the HME to suction as needed.
- Some HMEs have a suction port door that can be opened to pass a suction catheter.

Caution

- Monitor secretions. If you notice more secretions, or they become thicker, do not wear the HME. It can become clogged and you will not be able to breathe. Use other methods to maintain moisture and notify your care provider.
- Be sure you can safely remove the HME if you have difficulty breathing. If not, a care provider should be immediately available to help.
- If the filters inside the HME move, do not attempt to reposition them. You can accidentally block your airway. Discard the HME and place a new one.
- Do not attempt to clean the filters or add water or saline. You will not be able to breathe well if the filters are wet.
- A tracheostomy mist set up should not be placed over a HME device because there may be too much moisture, causing difficulty breathing.
- Do not reuse the HMEs, they are for one time use.