

Irritation of the Tracheostoma Related to Radiation Therapy

A tracheostoma (TRAY-key-ohs-TOE-ma) is a special opening made in a person's windpipe to make breathing easier. If you have a tracheostoma in the area that is being treated with radiation therapy, you may experience temporary irritation of your stoma (opening). This is known as tracheitis (tray-key-I-tiss).

The lining of your trachea (windpipe) may become dry and irritated. The dryness can make it difficult to cough mucus out of your windpipe. Your stoma may become crusty, and your mucus may become thick. You may notice a small amount of blood in your mucus.

The following suggestions may help relieve these symptoms:

- Gently clean the skin around your stoma as you have been instructed. Remove any loose crusts. **Do not** forcibly remove crusts that are firmly attached.
- Apply moisturizer as instructed by your nurse.
- Protect the skin of your neck and around the stoma if you are outdoors for more than 10 minutes, summer or winter. Use a PABA free sunscreen with a minimum protection factor of 30.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer at your bedside. This will help moisten the air you breathe. **Change the water in the vaporizer daily.**
- Sit in a steam-filled bathroom for 20 minutes, three times a day.
- You may use a "bullet" of normal saline solution in your stoma to moisten your windpipe and ease coughing up mucus.
- You also may make your own saline (called "normal saline") and use an eye-dropper to place the normal saline in your stoma. Your nurse can review these instructions with you and provide you with a sterile covered container. Normal saline is made by dissolving **one teaspoon** of table salt in **one quart** of water. Bring the salt solution to a boil. Let it cool. Pour into a sterile container and discard any fluid that does not fit into the container. Cover the container. Be sure to mix a fresh solution daily.
- Drink six to eight glasses of fluids a day, unless your doctor has restricted the amount of fluids you are allowed due to another medical condition.