

Head and Neck Oncology

A guide to using your nebuliser

Information for patients



What is a nebuliser?

A nebuliser is a device that turns a saline solution (a mixture of water and salt) into a mist, which can then be breathed in through a facemask or mouthpiece. People with head and neck cancer may find that using a nebuliser helps to relieve some of the side effects of radiotherapy or surgery.

Nebuliser parts

The nebuliser comes in four parts:

- An air compressor, which pumps a stream of air to create a fine mist. This is the nebuliser machine.
- A small plastic container, which holds the liquid to be turned into a mist. This is the nebuliser chamber.
- A length of air tubing, which directs the stream of air from the nebuliser machine to the nebuliser chamber.
- A facemask, from which the mist can be inhaled. Sometimes a mouthpiece is used instead of a facemask.

Nebuliser machine



Air outlet nozzle

Air tubing



Nebuliser chamber



How to use the nebuliser

Place the nebuliser machine on a table near to where you will be using it and plug it into the mains electricity.

Connect the air tubing between the air outlet on the nebuliser machine and the nozzle on the underside of the nebuliser chamber. Sometimes the flow of air can cause the tubing to become disconnected. If this happens, you can trim the tubing with scissors to make it fit more securely.

Turn the air supply from the nebuliser machine off, then unscrew the top of the nebuliser chamber. Pour between 5ml and 10ml of the saline solution into the cup of the nebuliser chamber. Do not overfill the cup, as the air flow through the solution may then not be strong enough to create a mist. Only use the saline solution that you have been prescribed. We will give you a supply of this to take home.

Connect either the facemask or the mouthpiece to the nebuliser chamber. These attach directly to the top of the nebuliser chamber.

Switch on the nebuliser machine – the saline solution should then begin to mist. The nebuliser chamber should be held upright, so that the air can flow through the saline solution. It will not work properly if it is held horizontally or at too much of an angle.

Breathe through your mouth to inhale the mist. Breathe in a normal and relaxed way; it is not necessary to breathe quickly or inhale deeply. Use the nebuliser for as long as needed or until it has stopped misting, then switch it off.

How to clean the nebuliser

Before starting any cleaning the nebuliser machine should be unplugged from the electricity supply. The nebuliser machine can be wiped with a dry cloth to remove any dust.

Clean the nebuliser chamber and the facemask (or mouthpiece) daily. Wash them in warm, soapy water and then rinse thoroughly in clean water. After cleaning, allow them to air dry. Do not use any kind of towel or tissue for drying, as there is a chance that lint fibres left behind could be inhaled.

To clean the nebuliser chamber you will need to take apart the top, medicine cup and baffle (a mushroom shaped piece of plastic that sits inside the cup). Do make sure that you put back the baffle when reassembling the nebuliser.

Replace the facemask and nebuliser chamber weekly; we will give you a supply of these and you can ask us for more when you need them.

There will be a small amount of saline solution left in the nebuliser cup, even after it has stopped misting. You should dispose of this and start with a fresh saline solution each time you use the nebuliser.

Safety precautions

Always keep the tubing, the nebuliser machine, and all parts relating to it away from children.

Position the nebuliser machine on a clean table surface. Do not place it on carpet, as fibres can be drawn up into the unit when it is being used.

Make sure that the air supply from the nebuliser machine is switched off before removing the top of the nebuliser chamber. If the top is removed with the air flowing, the baffle will be blown out of the chamber by the air flow.

Do not use or store the nebuliser in a room that is very dusty or smoky.

The air intake grills on the nebuliser machine should not be obstructed or covered. Do not try to adapt or modify the nebuliser in any way.

As with all electrical equipment, the nebuliser machine must not come into contact with water or any other liquid whilst connected to the mains electricity.

Returning your nebuliser

We rely on the nebuliser machines being returned once they are no longer needed, so that we can continue to be able to loan them out to other people.

When your symptoms have improved and you no longer need your nebuliser, please return it to the Churchill Hospital, Oxford, OX3 7LE. You can bring it back to the Radiotherapy Department, to Blenheim Outpatients, or to your follow-up appointment in the Head and Neck clinic at the Oncology Outpatients Department.

If you have any questions about using or returning the nebuliser, please telephone the radiotherapy nurses or the Head and Neck Specialist Nurses.

Radiotherapy nurses

Tel: 01865 235 472

Head and Neck Specialist Nurses

Tel: 01865 234 346

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

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