

Tissue Viability Team

VAC Therapy

What is VAC therapy?

VAC therapy is a relatively new therapy where wound healing is concerned. It may also be referred to as TNP therapy, sub-atmospheric therapy or suction therapy. It is a simple but effective method to promote rapid wound healing. It is an active wound therapy rather than a wound dressing.

What does it do?

A vacuum or negative pressure (suction) is applied to the wound bed through a foam dressing. This is held in place by a clear sticky dressing. There must be an effective seal around the dressing for the system to work. A tube is placed into the foam, which is attached to a container in the pump. The pump gently sucks on the wound, to remove some of the swelling and the excess fluid in the wound. By removing the excess fluid the blood supply to the wound is increased and healing is encouraged.

How long will the therapy be on the wound?

The therapy will be on the wound until the wound can be managed with another treatment. This is often another type of dressing. If you are not happy with continuing the therapy you must discuss this with your nurse/ doctor.

When will the sponges be changed?

The sponges will usually be changed every two to three days. However this will depend on your wound. The nurses will assess your wound each dressing change and decide how often the dressing needs changing

How often will the canister be changed?

If the fluid canister becomes full the machine will alarm and the display will tell you that the canister needs changing. If the canister does not become full it can remain in place for no more than seven days with the foam dressing being changed in between.



Patient Information

Will there be any pain?

There is sometimes some pain when the suction goes onto the wound however this should disappear, if it does not please tell the nurse. The nurses may be able to make adjustment to the strength of the suction and how long it lasts for.

When the sponge is taken off it can cause some pain, the nurses may need to soak the foam with saline (sterile salty water) if it is sticking to the wound. A non stick dressing is applied underneath the foam to try to reduce the adherence of the dressing in the wound. Pain killers can be given before the dressing change to make the dressing change less painful if needed. A spray adhesive remover can be used to remove the sticky dressing if required.

Moving around while on the therapy

You can move around when you are on the therapy. The pump can only be disconnected, for a total of 2 hours in 24 hours otherwise it will affect the healing of your wound.

Machine alarm

If the machine alarms, there is a display that will tell you what the problem is.

The main reasons why the machine may alarm are:

- Leak (low pressure alarm)
- Canister full
- Therapy not on
- The staff can explain this in more detail should you wish to receive further information.

Can I have a bath or shower when using VAC therapy?

You can have a bath as long as the dressing is in such a place that it will not be soaking in the water, as the seal of the dressing may be affected and the therapy will not work properly. You are able to have a shower as long as you avoid getting the dressing too wet.

A shower may be easier to prevent the dressing from loosening or have a bath on the day of the planned dressing changes.

For baths and showers you will need to be disconnected from the pump first. Please ask your nurse for advice.

Can I go home on VAC Therapy?

You may be able to go home on VAC Therapy. If so the staff caring for you will arrange for a nurse to change the dressings at home and make sure you have a portable unit.

Patient Information

Some dressings will be given to you to take home for the first dressing changes, after this the nurses caring for you will order some more.

Further Information

Stopping smoking will improve your chances of wound healing. University Hospital has a dedicated NHS Stop Smoking Service that can provide medication and advice on how to give you the best chance of quitting smoking for good. For more information ask a member of staff or contact the 'No Butts' Stop Smoking Service on 024 7696 4760 or e-mail: stopsmoking.services@uhcw.nhs.uk

This patient education leaflet has been produced by the Tissue Viability Team, University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6154 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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