

# Having vacuum assisted closure (VAC) therapy to help your wound heal

Department of Tissue Viability

Information for Patients

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## What is vacuum assisted closure (VAC) therapy?

You have been given this leaflet because it has been suggested that VAC therapy may help your wound to heal.

VAC stands for vacuum assisted closure therapy. It is a special system for treating wounds that could help speed up healing or manage your symptoms better. It is also known as 'VAC' or 'negative pressure wound therapy' (NPWT).

## Why do I need this treatment?

There are several reasons for this:

- drains excess fluid from the wound
- cleans the wound more effectively
- prevents infection
- keep your wound moist and warm
- help heal the wound from the bottom up and over
- increase blood flow to your wound
- reduce redness and swelling (inflammation)
- help the wound heal faster and this will help to reduce your stay in hospital.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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## What does it do?

The VAC system has several parts to it. It applies a vacuum to your wound.

- During treatment, a special foam or gauze dressing is placed into your wound.
- An adhesive film then covers this and seals the dressing and the wound. The cover is known as drape.
- A drainage tube is stuck over a hole in the adhesive film. This connects to the portable vacuum pump. This pump creates a suction effect on the wound all the time which can help wounds heal more quickly. The canister collects the excess fluid from your wound helping to keep your skin and clothing dry.
- During the therapy, you will need to carry the pump with you wherever you go.
- You may be able to go home with a pump depending on your circumstances.

The V.A.C. machine is on for 24 hours a day.

## Does it hurt?

You might feel a slight sucking in or drawing sensation when the machine is first switched on.

## Are there any side effects/risks?

Sometimes the wound may become tender or itch as it heals. This is usually a good sign but if it carries on please speak to your nurse or doctor. Bleeding from the wound may occur, if this happens you must let nursing staff or community nurses know straight away.

## Can I have a bath or shower?

No. The drape may become loose if it gets wet and lose its seal. However, it may be possible that a shower can be planned to suit with dressing changes.

## How often does the dressing need to be changed?

Your dressing will be changed 2 times a week by the specialist nurse/ doctor who is trained in VAC therapy. When you go home it will be changed by the community nurses.

## Will my mobility be restricted?

No. There are two types of V.A.C. machines. A large one is known as an ULTA which has a battery life of 6 hours and can be attached to a drip stand or wheelchair that can move around with you.

The machine that is used more often is an Activac that has a battery life of 10 hours. It has its own carry case that can be hung over your shoulder when moving around.

The machine must always be kept turned on so that the therapy works. The Activac is the machine you would take home with you if needed. Education would be given to you before your discharge and support would be given by the community nurses who would continue the dressing changes at home.

## **How many hours a day does it need to be on?**

The machine needs to be on for 24 hours a day. The machine is best left plugged into the mains electricity when you are not moving around to keep the battery fully charged.

## **What happens if the machine fails or is switched off?**

It is not necessary to switch the machine off at all. An alarm will sound and the screen will tell you if there is a problem.

While you are in hospital- the alarm sounds you must tell one of the nursing staff.

If you are at home you would have been given training before discharge of how to deal with a simple problem or contact the community nurses.

If for any reason the problem cannot be solved or the machine has been switched off for more than 2 hours then you must always contact the community nurses.

## **Who can I talk to while in hospital??**

For any questions you have in hospital please contact the specialist nurse team who put the therapy on via the ward staff.

## **Having VAC therapy at home.**

It is possible that this therapy can be carried on at home. The ward staff will arrange this with your GP and community nurses. Training and support will be given before your discharge to you and/or anyone involved in your care at home. The community nurses will continue to change your dressing and support you at home.

## **Simple troubleshooting guide.**

The machine may alarm for 4 common reasons:

1. The canister is full and needs changing– change canister.
2. The tubing is blocked– change canister (if still blocked call community nurses)
3. The battery is low– plug in as soon as possible.
4. The drape has come unstuck– try patching the area with spare drape.

Always let the community nurses know if the machine is turned off for more than 2 hours.

## Changing the canister.

- Unlock machine screen (follow instructions on the screen)
- Turn machine off (press on/off button)
- Unclip canister– press down the lever in the side of the canister and gently slide off.
- Attach new canister– slide onto side lever. There should be a click.
- Undo old tubing from the tubing leading to the dressing. Screw on the new tubing.
- Put the old canister and tubing in a bag ready for the community nurses to dispose of.
- Turn machine on (press on/off button) and lock screen (press padlock symbol on the screen)
- The Community Nurse will visit you on .....to change your V.A.C. dressing.

Community nurse contact number– **0300 300 777** if you need help before that date. If you live out of county then call .....

The 3M/KCI 24 hour helpline number is **0800 980 8880 option 1** if you need any advice about changing the canister or advice about the machine alarming. They are the company we rent the VAC machines from. If 3M/KCI cannot help then contact the community nurses within 2 hours of the problem starting.

If a problem occurs, the community nurse that visits you may not always be able to change the dressing. They may remove it and dress your wound with normal dressing without the therapy. This is until a community nurse is able to come and re-apply. This is perfectly safe.

If you are attending an Outpatient's appointment where the doctor may remove the dressing to examine your wound please tell your community nurse of the date. They may need to arrange to re-apply the V.A.C. therapy at home if it is not replaced during your visit.

When you are discharged please remember to take the charger for the machine, the hard black carry case and any dressings we may give you.

**Contact details:** For any questions you have in hospital please contact the Tissue Viability Specialist nurse via ward staff. If at home contact your community nurses on **0300 300 7777**

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