

How to use an Acapella® device to clear mucus from your airways

Physiotherapy Department

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: November 2024

Next review: November 2027

Leaflet number: 1224 Version: 1

What is the Acapella®?

The Acapella® is a device which is used to help clear mucus (also called phlegm or sputum) from your lungs. It will be used to form part of your physiotherapy for airway clearance.

The device uses oscillating positive pressure. It is made of a plastic outer shell and has a rocker with magnets inside.

There is a dial on the end of the device which changes the airflow. Your physiotherapist will help you set this up.



How does the Acapella work?

When you breathe out through the Acapella air flows through the device making the rocker move like a see-saw. This causes vibrations which you will feel in your chest.

The vibrations in your airways help to move the mucus so it can be cleared more easily using airway clearance techniques.

Why do I need to use the Acapella?

If you have a problem with your lungs there is sometimes more mucus in your airways. If this mucus is not cleared with treatment, it can cause chest infections, damage to your airways or make your breathing more difficult.

It will also help to reduce any uncontrolled coughing.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

What happens if I don't clear the mucus from my lungs/ airways?

Mucus that is not cleared from your airways can:

- become infected and cause further damage to your airways.
- block the smaller airways which can result in the lungs not being able to work as effectively.
- make your breathing feel more difficult.
- affect your ability to carry out your normal daily activities.

How does physiotherapy help?

Physiotherapy for airway clearance uses techniques to help clear the mucus from your airways. It helps to loosen and move the mucus from all areas of your lungs.

It is much more effective and efficient compared to coughing alone.

There are many airway clearance techniques and your physiotherapist will help find the best one for you.

It may take time to find the right method for you, so always remember not to force airway clearance and make sure you have plenty of rest time whilst doing it.

How do I use my Acapella?

Your physiotherapist will show you how to use the Acapella and set the dial at the right number for you. They will advise you on how often you should use it.

1. You can use the Acapella whilst sitting or lying down.
2. Close your lips around the mouthpiece, making sure there is a good seal.
3. Take a slightly bigger breath than normal, in through your nose, and then blow out gently through the Acapella - do not force the breath.
4. You will feel vibrations in your chest.

Your personalised programme

My technique:

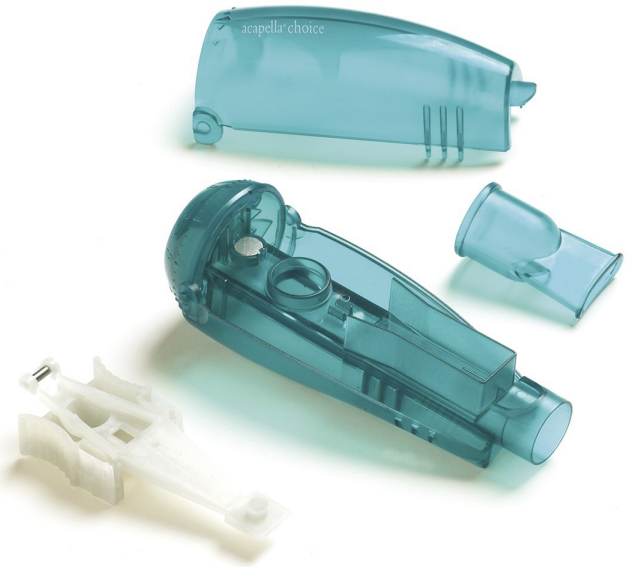
How long do I spend doing it and how often?:

How does this fit in with my inhalers/ nebulisers?:

How should I look after my Acapella?

You should clean your Acapella after every use as following:

- Separate into its individual parts (your physiotherapist will show you how to do this).
- Wash all parts thoroughly with warm soapy water.
- Rinse all parts with clean running water.
- Shake off excess water and leave to dry on a clean surface.
- Store the device in a clean, dry and safe place.
- You should sterilise your Acapella once a week by boiling it in water for at least 10 minutes. Make sure there is enough water to cover it entirely.



The Acapella can be cleaned in a dishwasher. Separate into its individual parts beforehand and put in the top rack of the dishwasher only.

You must also check the condition of your Acapella regularly. If you feel there are any problems please contact your physiotherapist.

Tips

- Use your Acapella when you have the most mucus to clear.
- Use the Acapella at a time of the day that suits you best.
- Make sure you are drinking plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration, especially when you have a chest infection.
- Exercise helps your general health and is also a natural form of respiratory physiotherapy. It improves airflow through the lungs and stimulates coughing, but you should not use general exercise instead of airway clearance exercises.
- Avoid using the Acapella when tired, in a hurry or straight after a meal.
- Remember that strenuous, uncontrolled coughing is tiring and harmful to your lungs. Your physiotherapist can teach you ways to help control your cough if needed.
- Mucus may continue to clear for a while after you have used the Acapella.
- In the long term, daily airway clearance can help to reduce the number and frequency of chest infections you may have.
- Please remember to bring your Acapella with you to your clinic appointments and if you come in to hospital, so that the physiotherapist can check how you are using it.

Summary

1. It is important to clear mucus from your lungs to reduce the risk of infection and keep your airways clear.
2. Your physiotherapist will talk to you about doing your airway clearance exercises after your inhalers/ nebulisers.
3. Your physiotherapist will help you to decide how much treatment is needed and how often, as everybody is different.
4. Any airway clearance exercise you do should clear mucus with the minimum of effort to reduce wheeze, cough and breathlessness.
5. Airway clearance aims to help bring the mucus as high up the lungs as possible before you cough it up.
6. Mucus may continue to clear for a while after you have done the technique.
7. As you gain confidence with these techniques you will find it easier to avoid coughing immediately at the first sign of mucus.
8. When the lungs produce large amounts of mucus, an airway clearance exercise usually needs to be done at least once a day and sometimes more often.

What if I have problems using my Acapella?

Contact your physiotherapist for advice if:

- you have any difficulty carrying out your airway clearance programme.
- your device looks damaged.
- your medical condition changes.
- it causes blood in your mucus (haemoptysis).
- your cough increases but it is not clearing the mucus.
- you need any further advice or guidance.

Your physiotherapist will monitor your airway clearance programme and change treatment as needed.

If you do not know how to contact your physiotherapist you can contact the Physiotherapy Department on 0116 258 3595 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm). Please note that this is not a service for urgent or emergency problems.

For urgent advice please contact your GP or call the NHS helpline on 111.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

6  LEICESTER'S
RESEARCH 

Leicester's Hospitals is a research active trust so you may find research happening on your ward or in your clinic. To find out about the benefits of research and become involved yourself, speak to your clinician or nurse, call 0116 258 8351 or visit www.leicestersresearch.nhs.uk/patient-and-public-involvement