Intermountain® Healthcare

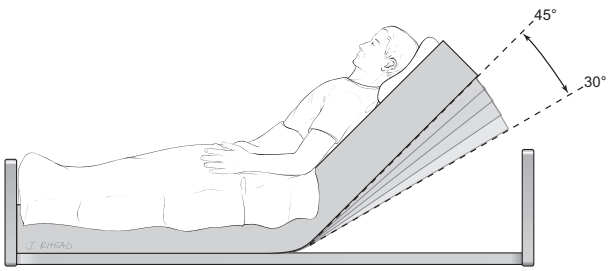
Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia

What is ventilator-associated pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs. A ventilator is a machine that helps a patient breathe by giving oxygen through a tube. The tube can be placed in a patient's mouth, nose, or through a hole in the front of the neck. The tube is connected to a ventilator. Ventilator-associated pneumonia (or VAP) is a lung infection of pneumonia that develops in a person who is on a ventilator.

Why do I need a ventilator?

You may need a ventilator when you are very ill, or during or after surgery. Ventilators can save lives, but they can also increase the chance of getting pneumonia by making it easier for germs to get into the lungs.



Your healthcare provider will raise the head of your bed between 30 and 45 degrees.

Can ventilator-associated pneumonia be treated?

Ventilator-associated pneumonia is a very serious infection. Most of the time it can be treated with antibiotics. The choice of antibiotics depends on which specific germs are causing the infection. Your healthcare provider will decide which antibiotic is best.

Preventing ventilator-associated pneumonia

Your healthcare providers will do everything they can to prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia. You and your family members need to work with them. Here's how you can all work together:

YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS will do these things to prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia:

- **Clean their hands** with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after touching you or the ventilator.
- **Keep the head of your bed raised** between 30 and 45 degrees, unless other medical conditions do not allow it.
- **Check your ability to breathe on your own** every day so that you can be taken off the ventilator as soon as possible.
- **Clean the inside of your mouth** on a regular basis.
- **Clean or replace equipment** between use on different patients.

YOU and your family members can do these things to prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia:

- **Make sure that all healthcare providers caring for you clean their hands** with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- **Keep your own hands clean.**
- **Ask about raising the head of your bed.**
- **Ask when you will be allowed to try breathing on your own.**
- Have your family members **ask how often your mouth has been cleaned.**
- **If you smoke, quit.** Patients who smoke get more infections. If you are going to have surgery and will need to be on a ventilator, talk to your doctor before your surgery about how you can quit smoking.

The information in this fact sheet is cosponsored by:

Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA)
Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA)
American Hospital Association
Association for Practitioners in Infection Control (APIC)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
The Joint Commission

© 2009 Intermountain Healthcare. All rights reserved. The content presented here is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, and it should not be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns. More health information is available at **intermountainhealthcare.org. Patient and Provider Publications 801.442.2963 FS126 - 07/09** *Also available in Spanish.*