

Department of plastic surgery

VAC[®] (Vacuum Assisted Closure) therapy

What is VAC (Vacuum Assisted Closure) therapy?

VAC therapy is used in the department of plastic surgery to help wound healing, or to keep a wound clean and sealed between multiple operations. It uses a vacuum (negative pressure) with specialised dressings.

It is made up of 5 main components:

- 1. A therapy unit** with a canister to hold the fluid – This is the 'brain' of the VAC therapy system. It manages and records the negative pressure system and alarms if there is a problem.
- 2. A Sensa TRAC™ Pad** – Excess fluid and potentially infectious materials are removed from the wound through the Sensa TRAC pad and into the canister.
- 3. Foam dressings** – The VAC foam dressings work in combination with the negative pressure, to promote wound healing.
- 4. A contact layer** is placed underneath the foam to protect the wound.
- 5. VAC drape** – This is an adhesive layer spread across the foam dressing, ensuring a closed, moist wound healing environment.



How does VAC therapy work?

The VAC therapy foam dressing is placed in or on to the wound. The foam and a few centimetres of surrounding skin will be covered with the clear drape. A hole will be cut in the centre of the drape and your Sensa TRAC pad will be placed on top of it. The other end of the tubing will be connected to the canister, which is attached to the therapy unit.

What to expect:

When the VAC therapy system is in place and the unit is turned on, the foam dressing collapses. At this time, you may feel a slight pulling sensation. The VAC therapy system pulls potentially infectious materials and other fluids from your wound, through the tube and collects them in the canister.

VAC therapy stays on 24 hours a day so that it can continuously deliver its benefits to your wound healing process.

You should check frequently:

- Is the system on?
- Does it say 'Therapy on'?
- Are all the clamps open?
- Has the dressing collapsed down?

Frequently asked questions:

How long will I receive VAC therapy?

That depends on the type of your wound and the reason for the therapy. Your surgeon is responsible for all clinical decision making regarding your VAC therapy.

How does VAC therapy feel?

Many patients report a mild pulling sensation initially which tends not to be noticeable after about 15 minutes. As the wound heals, it may feel increasingly tender or itchy. Please report any changes to your treating surgical team.

How often does the dressing need to be changed?

The frequency of dressing change depends upon the reason for VAC therapy, but will be no less than once per week. This will be undertaken by a specially trained dressings nurse or member of your surgical team.

Will the dressing change hurt?

Some wound types may cause the patient to experience some discomfort and your treating medical professional can advise you on pain relief.

Is VAC therapy safe?

Yes. VAC therapy has been used all around the world. The interaction of all V.A.C.® therapy components ensures controlled, consistent and safe therapy.

Can I move around?

The aim of VAC therapy is to keep you as mobile as possible. However, that depends on the location of the wound and the treatment prescribed. Ask your medical professional about your personal situation.

What happens if the system alarms?

The VAC therapy system has both audible and visual alarms that describe the nature of the problem. Most alarms are easily solved. This is something your treating medical professional can explain in more detail so you are comfortable with this safety system.

For your safety, the system will alarm if any of the following occurs:

- **Canister is full** The alarm will sound if the canister is full, or if the tubing is kinked or blocked. The full canister will be removed and replaced by a new canister. This is undertaken by a medical professional. If you are going home with the VAC and prefer it, you or a relative can be taught by the ward staff to change the canister prior to discharge.
- **There is a leak** You may hear a whistling sound indicating air is entering the drape. In this scenario, leaks in the drape are repaired using a new piece of drape. This is undertaken by a medical professional and needs to occur within **2 hours** of a new leak. You can be taught by the ward staff how to apply additional drape should this occur.
- **Battery is low/dead** Recharge battery by plugging the system into the wall outlet.
- **Therapy is not activated** Therapy can be re-activated by pressing 'Power' to turn unit off, then press again to turn unit on.

Can I go home with VAC therapy?

This depends on many factors, including the size/location of your wound, reason for the therapy and planned duration. Your surgeon will determine if it is appropriate for you to be discharged from the hospital on a VAC therapy system. In many cases, patients do continue their VAC therapy at home. Your district nurses will be notified, to continue close monitoring at home and arrangements will be made for you to return to The Christie for wound check/dressing change. If you have any concerns at all regarding your VAC therapy whilst at home, please contact us immediately on the numbers overleaf:

Surgical oncology ward (Dept 4): **0161 446 3680**

Plastics dressings team: **0161 446 7586**

Tissue viability specialist nurse: **0161 918 7989**

The Christie Hotline: **0161 446 3658** (24 hours)

Daily tips

- It is recommended that you remain on VAC therapy 24 hours a day, unless otherwise directed by your medical professional.
- The clear drape is waterproof and you may lightly wash with dressings in place, being careful not to soak thoroughly.
- The therapy unit is an electrical system and should not become wet.
- If the Therapy ON/OFF button is accidentally turned off, push the same button to turn the unit back on. The system will return to all the correct settings and therapy will continue. **There is a 'lock' button which can be activated to prevent accidental turn off of the machine.**

Safety information:

Please notify us **immediately** if:

- You notice a significant change in the colour or consistency of the fluid in your canister i.e. if the drainage turns cloudy or bright red.
- You see excessive bleeding under the drape, in the tubing or the canister.
- You notice increased redness or odour from the wound.
- You experience increased pain.
- You have a fever.
- You experience severe itching, rash or hives.
- There is a leak.
- The VAC therapy system is left off for more than 2 hours.
- You change your medication.
- You have any other concerns.

Further help

If you wish to discuss VAC therapy or have any other questions, please contact your specialist nurse:

Skin cancer CNSs **0161 918 7587**

Caroline Owens

Sarah Fulton

Emma Mitchell

Sarcoma CNS **0161 918 2196**

Breast reconstruction CNS **0161 918 2196**

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week