



# Vacuum Assisted Closure (VAC) Therapy Unit: aftercare advice

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## Information for patients

You will be sent home from hospital with a VAC Therapy Unit covering your wound. The following leaflet explains how this treatment can help your wound to heal and how to look after the unit.

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## My VAC dressing checklist

Before you leave the hospital make sure you have:

- the VAC machine turned **on** and attached correctly
- the carrying case to put the VAC machine in when moving around
- two weeks' worth of foams and canisters (five foams and three canisters); and
- the VAC machine black box with the charger inside.

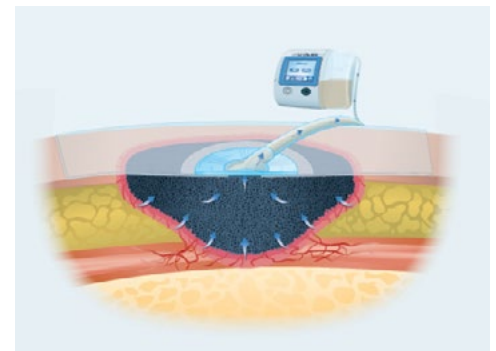
The VAC Therapy Unit is a very expensive piece of equipment, so please look after it carefully. Thank you.

## What is it?

Vacuum Assisted Closure (VAC) is a medical procedure used to help your wound heal.

## How does it work?

By applying negative pressure into your wound, the unit helps to draw your wound edges together. It removes possible infectious materials and other fluids from your wound. It does this by using a sterile sealed wound dressing (a foam dressing that is placed into your wound). This dressing is attached to a pump through a tube that brings the infectious material from your wound into a canister (see image).



For instructions on how to empty and dispose of your used canisters, please see the instructions at the end of this leaflet.

When you are discharged from hospital, the nurse in charge of your care will complete a referral for your district nurse, explaining that you have been sent home with a VAC unit. The district nurse should contact you to arrange an appropriate time for the wound dressing change. If that does not happen, please call your GP two days after returning home to check that they have received this referral.

### What are its benefits?

- VAC is a relatively non-invasive treatment option.
- The pump that creates the negative pressure is usually small and portable (you can move around with it attached to you).
- Many wounds undergoing VAC therapy can be treated at home, with a district nurse visiting you to change your dressings. Using a continued vacuum helps your wound to heal, by stimulating cell growth, increasing blood flow to the injured area, and drawing out excess fluid from your wound.
- It also creates an anaerobic environment (an environment without air in it) that makes it difficult for bacteria to grow and reduces your chances of getting a wound infection.
- The vacuum effect helps to contract the edges of your wound and makes it smaller.

### Are there alternative treatments?

The alternative would be to use a different type of dressing, but it might not have the same effect in terms of healing and infection prevention.

### How do I use the unit?

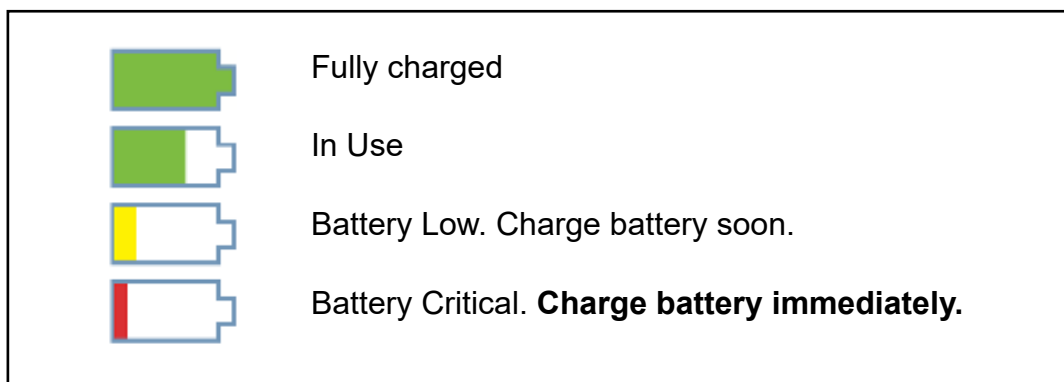
The unit is attached to you before you leave hospital and you will be shown how to use it by a member of staff. Please ask any questions you may have at this time.

**Please do not remove the unit yourself.** When you no longer need it, one of the healthcare professionals responsible for your care, either in the hospital or community, will remove it for you.

## How do I charge the unit?

The unit needs to be on and charging when you are sitting or lying down.

- It needs at least eight hours to fully charge each day.
- While it is charging you can go out, move around, or simply have the unit unplugged. But bear in mind you will need to plug it in as soon as you can before it runs out of battery.
- You will find the following screen, showing the battery level, on your unit. Aim for the unit to be fully charged but keep checking the battery level in case the unit needs recharging.



**Your machine must not be left with no battery or switched OFF for more than two hours a day.**

## Can I move around and shower?

One clear goal of VAC therapy is to keep you moving around as much as possible. However, how much you can move around will depend on where your wound is and the treatment that you have been prescribed.

Care should be taken not to lie on the tubing that leads from your wound to the pump, as this may make your skin sore. You need to be careful when getting into and out of bed and moving around, as the VAC unit may be plugged in (to re-charge) and the tubing is quite long. The smaller VAC unit has a carrying case which may make it easier for you to move around with the unit.

The unit must be disconnected from the dressing if you need to have a wash or shower, but for no longer than about 15 minutes. To do that, switch the unit OFF, clamp the tubing, and disconnect it. **The dressing must not get soaked and the unit must not get wet.** Once you finish showering or washing yourself, make sure you re-connect all the tubing again and release all the clamps. Other than when washing, you need to have the unit ON at all times.

The VAC Therapy Unit is a very expensive piece of equipment, so please look after it carefully. Thank you.

## What if my dressings become soiled (dirty)?

If dressings become soiled, gently clean them with mild soap and water.

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

Normally your dressing is changed every two to three days, but this depends on the type of wound that you have. The district nurses will provide you with the dates that they will come to your home and change your dressing.

### How often do I need to change the canister?

You will be sent home from hospital with enough canisters to last for two weeks. After that, your district nurse will provide more, as you need them.

You can change the canister yourself once it is full, see instructions on how to do this on page 9 of this leaflet. Please note you should let your GP and district nurse know if your canister fills up completely between visits.

### How long is my treatment going to be?

The length of the treatment will vary between patients and depend on how well your wound heals.

### How do I know if the therapy unit is working properly?

The Therapy Status Bar at the bottom of the home screen (see image on page 9) displays specific therapy information: The spinning icon shows that negative pressure is being applied.

Another way to tell that negative pressure is being applied, is the foam dressing will be collapsed (flat against your wound) or wound fluid may be moving in the tubing.

### What are the risks involved in using this therapy?

As with all medical procedures, there are some risks involved when using VAC therapy. For more information please review the manufacturer guidelines.

### Is this therapy painful?

VAC therapy can be painful, particularly when dressings are changed. Once pressure is applied, most patients report their pain levels out (stays the same); however, the level of pain greatly depends on your wound type, where the wound is, how well it is healing, and your individual pain threshold.

### Can I take pain relief?

Patients are often treated with pain relief medications before their dressing is changed and throughout their treatment with a VAC unit. If you have experienced pain when having your dressing applied or changed in the past, we suggest that you take painkillers 30 to 60 minutes before your dressing is due to be changed. Take the painkillers prescribed by your GP or the hospital. If you have not been prescribed painkillers, please use paracetamol, unless told otherwise by your doctor.

**Take painkillers regularly to try and keep your level of discomfort at a bearable level at all times. This will allow the inflammation to settle.**

**Do not wait until your wound is very painful to take the painkillers as it is then more difficult to control.**

You can take the following painkillers, depending on your age and weight (unless you have been told otherwise by your doctor).

- Tablet paracetamol: 1g; every 4 to 6 hours (maximum dose of 4g per day)
- Tablet ibuprofen: 200mg to 400mg; every 6 to 8 hours
- Codeine Phosphate: 30mg to 60mg; every 6 to 8 hours.

**Always check with your GP what is the best pain relief for you. This is especially important if you have any medical conditions, take any other medication, or if you need something stronger to help the pain.**

As your wound heals it may become tender or itchy; this is normally a good sign but if discomfort continues, please tell your GP or district nurse.

**Tell your nurse, GP, or district nurse immediately if:**

- You see clear drainage turn cloudy or bright red, an excessive bleeding under the drape (the plastic film covering the foam and skin around it), in the tubing, or in the canister. If you have recently had heart surgery, or surgery on blood vessels, or are on bloodthinners, you may have a higher risk of bleeding, whether you are using VAC Therapy or not.
- You see more redness or smells coming from your wound.
- You experience increased pain.
- You experience any swelling, rash, hives, and/or severe itching around your wound. VAC therapy dressings, drape and canisters are germ and latex-free but in a very small number of cases, some patients experience an allergic reaction to the drape on their skin. **If you have difficulty breathing, call 111 immediately for advice.**
- The VAC is left OFF for more than two hours.
- Your medication has been changed .

**If you have already been discharged from hospital and you experience any of the above:** turn the therapy unit OFF right away and apply pressure over the area. Do not remove your dressing. Contact the district nurse, tissue viability nurse, or your GP (or 111 for out of hours enquiries) and they will advise you on what to do next.

**The therapy unit is sometimes noisy. Why is this and what can I do about it?**

Though the therapy unit may be very quiet at times, it will make noises while applying negative pressure to your wound. Noise may seem louder at night when everything is quiet.

If there is a leak, the unit noise may increase, and the unit alarm will begin. Once the leak is fixed, the unit will no longer alarm and become quieter. The unit may also make a burping sound occasionally.

Placing the therapy unit below the level of your wound may allow the system to work better and more quietly. It is normal to hear noise from your VAC therapy unit.

## Can the VAC Therapy Unit be used during other procedures?

Use the chart below to determine whether VAC therapy can continue during specific procedures.

Diagnostic Procedure	Therapy unit compatible	Therapy unit not compatible	Dressing compatible	Dressing not compatible
MRI scan		✓	✓	
HBO		✓		✓
X-ray	✓		✓	
CT scan	✓		✓	
Dye tests	✓		✓	
Fluoroscopy	✓		✓	
Ultrasound	✓		✓	

If you need an:

- MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan, your doctor or nurse must remove the therapy unit. The dressing can remain in place.
- HBO (Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy), your doctor or nurse must remove the therapy unit and dressing.

Your doctor or nurse should review the safety information sheet for important information about these diagnostic procedures. This document is kept in the pocket on the therapy unit carrying case.

**Warning: if your therapy unit will be OFF for more than two hours, call your doctor or nurse right away. Without power to the therapy unit, your dressing will need to be replaced as soon as possible.**

The VAC Therapy Unit is a very expensive piece of equipment, so please look after it carefully. Thank you.

## What else can I do to help my wound heal?

Wound healing can take a long time and it is normal to get frustrated and anxious. Remember that while you have your VAC dressing on, there are some things you can do to help your wound to heal.

We suggest limiting the amount of alcohol you drink, stopping smoking, eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of fluids, and staying active. If you need any extra support, do not hesitate to get in touch with us, using the contact details on page 7.

Some painkillers (especially the ones that contain Codeine) can cause constipation. Please follow a healthy well-balanced diet rich in fruit, vegetables (including green leafy vegetables), nuts, seeds, wholegrains, and legumes, which contain the necessary fibre, and drink plenty of water to prevent this.

For more information on the importance of eating your 5-A-Day please go to the following web site [www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/5-a-day-what-counts/?tabname=food-and-diet](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/5-a-day-what-counts/?tabname=food-and-diet)

## How do I return the unit and my supplies?

Once you have been told that you no longer need to use your VAC unit, you will have it removed by a healthcare professional. You have to call KCI Customer Care to arrange for its return. Customer Care will issue you with a unique discontinuation number and will arrange for the VAC unit to be collected.

The VAC unit has been given to you in a carry case. Please do not discard the case. The case is needed to return the VAC.

- **KCI Customer Care**  
Telephone: 0800 98 08 88 0

## Important

- Read and follow all instructions and safety information.
- Do not change the settings on the VAC therapy unit or change/remove your dressing without your doctor/nurse present.
- Do not attempt to service or repair this equipment. If you have any concerns with the VAC therapy unit, please call KCI Customer Care on Freephone 0800 980 8880.
- Do not make changes to the therapy unit or your dressing. Do not connect the therapy unit or dressing to other devices that you might be using.
- Do not drop or insert any object into any opening or tubing on the therapy unit. Keep the therapy unit away from heated surfaces (such as radiators, hot water bottles, or electric blankets).
- Do not spill fluids on any part of the therapy unit. If spills do occur, unplug the unit immediately, if plugged in. Clean the fluid from the therapy unit. Make sure there is no moisture on the unit and power supply before plugging in. If the unit does not work correctly, call KCI.
- Do not use the therapy unit in the bath or shower. Do not place the therapy unit where it can fall or be pulled into a tub, shower, or sink.
- Do not reach for a therapy unit that has fallen into water. If plugged in, unplug the unit immediately. Disconnect the unit from the dressing and call KCI.

## What if I have any questions or concerns about the therapy?

If you need any more information or have any other concerns or questions, do not hesitate to contact:

- Your GP
- East Kent Community Service  
Telephone: 0300 12 30 91 5
- KCI Customer Care  
Telephone: 0800 98 08 88 0
- In case of an out of hours or urgent enquiry  
Telephone: 111

**Please note: the information about the VAC dressing specifications is provided by KCI through their ACTIV.A.C.TM THERAPY SYSTEM: User Manual for Patients and Clinicians.**



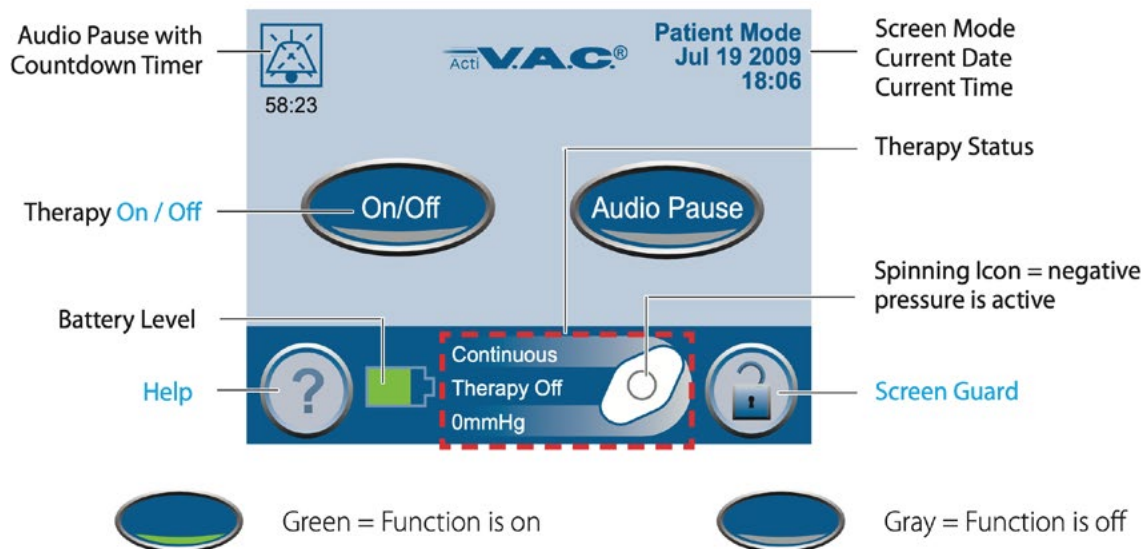
## Instructions on how to look after your VAC Therapy Unit

The VAC Therapy Unit is a very expensive piece of equipment, so please look after it carefully. Thank you.

### Patient Mode Home Screen

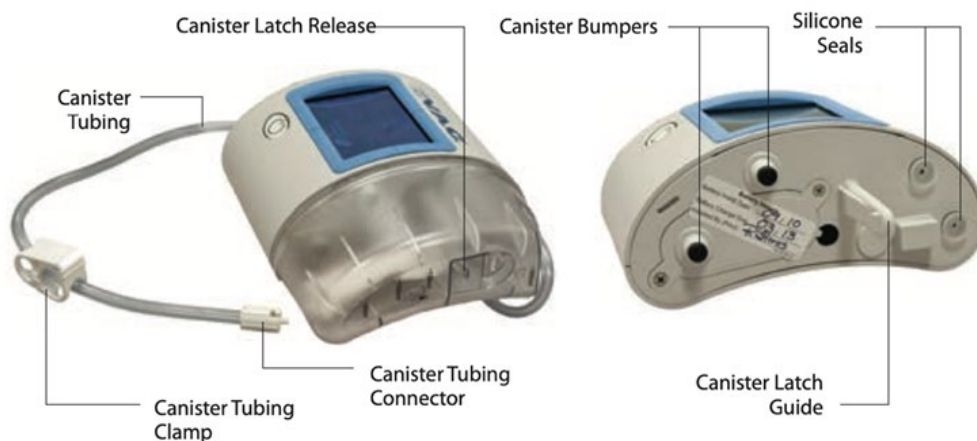
This is what the home screen will look like on your unit. Please take time to look through the screen and become familiar with the available functions.

#### Patient Mode Home Screen



### How do I look after the canister?

As with the home screen above, please take time to become used to the parts of the canister highlighted in the diagram below.



- The canister latch guide on the therapy unit may have sharp edges. Do not handle the therapy unit by the canister latch guide.
- When the therapy unit is not in use, store it in the carrying case without a canister in place.
- If the seals, canister latch guide, or the canister bumpers are damaged or missing from the therapy unit, please contact the unit manufacturer KCI on 0800 980 8880.

## How do I change the canister?

You will need to empty/change the canister at home between hospital visits. If you do not do this, the unit will stop working when it becomes full. The canister should be changed:

- when full (the alarm will sound and the unit will stop); or
- at least once a week to control the smell.

1. Do not turn the therapy unit OFF.
2. Press On / Off to stop therapy. (During a Canister Full Alarm, therapy will already be off).
3. Slide both tubing clamps toward the tubing connector.
4. Tightly close both tubing clamps to avoid spilling tubing contents.
5. Disconnect the dressing tubing from the canister tubing:
  - Push the connectors together
  - Twist the connectors to unlock (see figure 1).
  - Pull the connectors apart (see figure 2).
6. Remove the canister:
  - Press down on the canister latch release (see figure 3)
  - Pull the canister directly away from the therapy unit (see figure 4).

(Always apply the canister straight on and straight off the therapy unit. Do not twist or turn canister when installing or removing it).

Call your doctor or nurse about canister disposal. Do not dispose of the canister with your household rubbish. This could break local hazardous waste laws.

7. To install a new canister:
  - Slide the canister over the canister latch guide.
  - Do not twist or turn the canister as it is being installed.
  - Press the canister firmly onto the therapy unit.
  - When the canister is properly installed, it cannot be removed by gently pulling it away from the unit.
  - A click should be heard when the canister is properly installed.
8. Connect the new canister tubing to the dressing tubing:
  - Push the connectors together.
  - Twist the connectors to lock.
9. Open both tubing clamps (see figure 5).
10. Press ON/OFF on the touch screen to restart therapy.
11. Make sure the dressing collapses.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

**Make sure you keep the canister and unit upright at all times to prevent it from getting clogged**

## What happens if the VAC machine alarms?

The pump has alarms you can both see and hear. They will tell you what the problem is and how they are most easily solved.

### Reasons why the alarm goes off and what you should do

- **Canister is full or not engaged properly:** disengage the canister and reinstall it again. Make sure that it is fully engaged and latched. If the canister is full, you can replace it following the instructions on page 9.

#### Therapy will stop during this alarm

- **Blockage/Low pressure alarm:** this alert screen may appear when the tubing is blocked. If this is the case, you will hear a single tone. This is fixed by checking the tubing:
  1. Make sure both clamps on the tubing are open.
  2. Make sure that the tubing is not kinked, crimped, or blocked in any way.
  3. If the Blockage Alert remains after completing steps 1 and 2, lower the therapy unit and tubing so they are level with or below your wound site.
- **Battery is low:** this alert screen, showing the yellow battery, appears about two hours before the battery power runs out. Recharge the battery by plugging the system into the wall outlet.
- **Battery is critically low:** this alarm screen, showing the red battery, appears about 30 minutes before the battery power runs out. You should charge the machine as soon as possible.
- **Therapy Inactive Alarm:** this alarm screen appears when therapy has been OFF for 15 minutes (when the unit's power is on). This alarm will be accompanied by a repeated tone. This alarm is fixed by restarting therapy. You can:
  - Audio Pause: press Audio Pause to silence the audible tone. The audible tone will come back on in two minutes if the alarm condition has not been fixed.
  - Restart Therapy: Press Reset to return to the Patient Mode Home screen. Press ON/OFF to restart therapy.



If therapy is not desired, turn the therapy unit OFF using the Power button on the front of the unit.

- **There is a leak**

Most leaks happen:

- where the drape meets your skin
- where the tubing is attached to the clear drape
- at tubing connectors; and
- when the canister is not securely connected to the therapy unit.

To fix the leak:

- Check the tubing connectors between the dressing and the canister. Make sure they are properly locked.
- Make sure the canister is properly installed onto the therapy unit. When the canister is properly installed, it cannot be removed by gently pulling it away from the unit.

To detect a leak in the dressing:

- Make sure therapy is on.
- Using light pressure, move your hand and fingers slowly around the edges of the clear dressing, and on the connection between tubing and clear drape.
- Watch the VAC machine, pressure will return to normal and the frequency of the audible tone will decrease once the leak is found.
- You can stick some extra clear dressing on the area where the leak has been found.

If the problem does not resolve, you should try to contact your district nurse or KCI Customer Care on 0800 980 8880.

**Warning: if the therapy unit is OFF for more than two hours, you need to call your district nurse straight away. Without power to the therapy unit, your dressing will need to be replaced.**

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients**

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

**Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments** please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email [ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site [www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation](http://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation)