

## What does it all mean – my loved one is on a breathing machine?

### The tube & machine:

Sometimes when a person is not able to breath well on their own, a breathing tube is placed in the wind-pipe (trachea) and connected to a machine (ventilator) that helps the person breath. The ventilator provides air and oxygen when it supports the person’s breathing. There are some risks for complications to being on a ventilator, like pneumonia and blood clots.

### The healthcare team’s actions to reduce risk of complication:

The doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, and other members of the healthcare team are working together to reduce the risk of complications of being on a ventilator. This work includes:

- Keeping the head of the bed up to prevent secretions from causing pneumonia,
- Medication to prevent stomach ulcers,
- Medication or special leg sleeves to prevent blood clots,
- Frequent oral care to help prevent pneumonia,
- Breathing tests to evaluate progress,
- Medication to help the lungs breath often called a “breathing treatment”,
- Simple exercises done in bed often called passive range of motion to help keep muscles from getting too weak.

### What can you do to help your loved one?

You can be a valuable member of the care team - an extra set of eyes, or a gentle voice to help care givers. Here are some things you can do:

- Remind staff to raise the head of the bed if you see that it is flat. Be aware that sometimes the head of bed needs to be flat depending on patient situation.
- Ask about what you can do to help with the bed exercises (passive range of motion) if you think you would be comfortable. Many loved ones like to help with the gentle exercises and stretching.
- Ask if you can help with the oral care, such as moistening lips and mouth.

- Ask other members of the healthcare team to wash their hands if you do not see them do this. Washing hands is the number one way to prevent infection!