

# Steam Inhalation

## Definition:

*Steam Inhalation* consists of breathing in water vapor (steam) from gently boiling water. It can be breathed in through either the nose or mouth.

## When to Use:

- To reduce upper respiratory congestion
- To relieve dry or irritated upper respiratory membranes
- To relieve coughing
- To ease difficult breathing such as in croup or asthma
- To loosen thick, dry upper respiratory secretions

## Equipment:

- ✓ Source of steam, (example: steam vaporizer or electric skillet)
- ✓ 2 hand towels and one bath towel
- ✓ Sheet (if for bed tent)
- ✓ Umbrella (for bed tent)
- ✓ Eucalyptus oil or cut pine needles in water (Optional)

## Steps to Follow:

- 1) Gently boil water just enough to make light steam rise.
- 2) Add eucalyptus oil, or cut up pine needles as natural medication, if desired.
- 3) Drape towel over head; lean over the steam source—far enough above so unheated air can get under the towel.
- 4) For bed patient, make a steam tent by draping a sheet over an umbrella over patient.
- 5) Breathe slowly and deeply as tolerated.
- 6) Periodically remove the towel to breathe unheated air.
- 7) May want to put a moist, cold hand towel around neck so head doesn't get over heated
- 7) Continue as tolerated for up to 15-20 minutes.
- 8) Wipe face with cold, wet cloth and dry face well.
- 9) Rest for half an hour, or at least don't go out in cold until face is back to normal temperature.

## Cautions & Considerations :

- Treatment should not be given to small children or elderly if they do not tolerate heat well; or give mild, short treatment.
- Make sure steam is not concentrated to one area to avoid burning.
- Make sure plenty of fresh air is available by leaving one side of the tent open.
- If you are doing this to a bed patient, make sure to change bed linen afterwards if it is damp.
- Only inhale steam to patient's tolerance and pleasure.