

Tracheostomy

A Surgical Opening to Allow for Breathing

General Information

The doctor wants to use a tracheostomy as part of your family member's care.

There are many reasons to use a tracheostomy. It may be needed because of a blocked airway, facial injury and swelling, mouth or neck surgery or for long-term ventilator (respirator) use.

The doctor or nurse can talk with you about your family member's specific condition.

What Is a Tracheostomy?

A tracheostomy is a surgical opening in the windpipe (trachea) to create an airway for breathing. A tube is placed in the opening.

- When the tracheostomy tube is first placed, there may be some bleeding around it. This is normal.
- Your family member will need to continue with coughing and deep breathing exercises.
- The nurse will help your family member cough secretions from his or her lungs.
 - To do this, a small tube (catheter) is passed through the tracheostomy tube and inserted into the lungs.
 - A small amount of sterile water may be squirted into the lungs to thin out the secretions.
 - A vacuum carefully "suctions out" the secretions through the catheter.

- When your family member becomes strong enough to cough out secretions, there will be no need for suctioning.

Is There Any Discomfort?

Your family member may have some discomfort when the tube is inserted. To reduce discomfort, the area where the tube will be placed is numbed with medicine.

Once the tube is in place, there may still be some discomfort at the site. Pain medicine will be available for your family member to help ease the discomfort.

How Will Your Family Member Communicate?

Your family member will not be able to talk after the tracheostomy is placed. This is because the tube passes by the vocal cords.

- Your family member will have other ways to communicate, such as writing, picture communication, flash cards and lip reading.
- A special type of tracheostomy tube may be placed to allow your family member to talk. This may be used if the tracheostomy will be in place for a long time. The doctor will decide to use this based on your family member's overall condition and secretion amount.

If you have any questions or concerns about your family member's care, ask the doctor or nurse.