Tracheostomy

A tracheostomy is a procedure done to keep the airway open. The large tube going from your mouth to your lungs is called the trachea. This tube brings air to the lungs and allows you to breath. When this airway is opened up it is called a tracheostomy. This is done when anything is threatening to close the airway. That may be an infection, an accident, a mass or some other reason. It is a live saving surgical procedure. It is also used to help with breathing when respiratory failure is present. Respiratory failure means that the person does not have the energy or power to keep on breathing. When this occurs, along with most of the other problems mentioned above, the tube is connected to a ventilator (breathing machine) to assist with the breathing. A patient cannot talk with a tracheostomy because the air needed to produce sounds cannot pass the vocal cords (voice box).

PROCEDURE

A tracheostomy is most often done under general anesthetic. A general anesthetic means you are sleeping during the procedure. A small incision (cut) is then made down to and through the breathing tube (*trachea*) so that a plastic tube can be put in. This tube is called a tracheotomy tube.

HOW LONG MUST THE TUBE BE IN?

The length of time the tracheotomy tube must be in depends on the reason it was inserted.

- It may be permanent.
- If done for a surgical procedure, it may be removed following the surgery when no longer needed.
- If done for respiratory failure, it may be left in until the patient can safely breathe again by themselves without the assistance of a ventilator.
- If done because of trauma (this means damage caused in an accident), it will be left in for as long as it takes for the patient to safely breath by themselves again.

Your caregiver will discuss the length of time this tube will be left in and how it is to be cared for at home.

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