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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Global Tracheostomy Collaborative -

<http://globaltrach.org/tracheostomy>

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# Tracheostomy

Information for Patients and Families



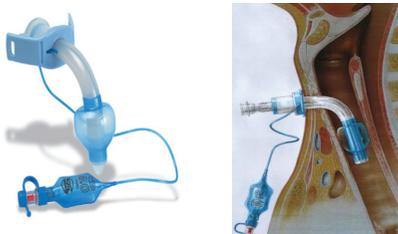
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## WHAT IS A TRACHEOSTOMY?

A tracheostomy is a surgical opening made in the neck to make another airway for you to breathe through.

## WHAT IS A TRACHEOSTOMY TUBE?



Tracheostomy Tube

Tracheostomy Tube in the Neck

A tracheostomy tube is a hollow tube. It has a small soft balloon around it called a “cuff”. The tracheostomy tube is placed in the hole in your neck to help you breathe. It is below your voicebox so you won’t be able to talk

## WHY DO I NEED A TRACHEOSTOMY TUBE?

A tracheostomy tube may be put in for different reasons:

- To help you breathe
- To keep your lungs clear of phlegm.

## WHAT IS SUCTIONING?

Suctioning is done to help remove phlegm from your lungs. The nurse or physiotherapist puts a long thin tube down your tracheostomy tube to gently suck out extra phlegm from your lungs. This can feel unpleasant and make you cough. As you get stronger you may be able to cough up phlegm on your own. Then you may not need suctioning.

## WHAT IS HUMIDIFICATION?

Breathing through your nose warms and moistens the air. This is humidified air and keeps phlegm thin. When you breathe through a tracheostomy, the air does not get warmed and moistened. Breathing in dry air can make phlegm go thick and sticky which makes it harder to cough up and clear your lungs. A humidifier machine is placed over your tracheostomy tube to warm and moisten the air you breathe. This helps keep your phlegm thin.

## COMMUNICATION

When a tracheostomy tube is in and the cuff is inflated, air moves directly in and out of the lungs. This means you will be unable to talk. You may need to communicate in other ways. You might communicate through use of:

**Communication Board** – we can give you a communication board with words or pictures on it. You can point to the word or picture you need.

**Writing** – We can give you a whiteboard or pen and paper to write messages.

**Speaking Valve** – When your breathing improves, we can let the cuff down on the tracheostomy tube. Then we can put a speaking valve on the end of the tracheostomy tube. The speaking valve sends air through your voice box and you will be able to speak.

## EATING AND DRINKING

You may not be able to eat and drink normally with a tracheostomy tube in. If you are not able to eat and drink, you may be fed with a tube. This tube would be put in your nose and be gently passed into your stomach. It is called a nasogastric tube.

## WHEN WILL THE TRACHEOSTOMY COME OUT?

The tracheostomy tube will be taken out when you can:

- breathe on your own
- cough strongly
- swallow your saliva safely

When the tracheostomy tube is taken out, the tracheostomy hole closes up. This usually takes a few days.

There is a Tracheostomy Review Team at St Vincent’s. There is a doctor, nurse, physiotherapist, speech pathologist and dietitian on the Tracheostomy Team. The team will work with you to get the tracheostomy out. Please speak to them if you have any questions.