



Tracheostomy

Basic information

A *tracheostomy* (tray-key-oss-tuh-me) is an opening made in the windpipe (trachea) in the lower neck. It is often called a “trach” (trake) for short. A tube is placed through the tracheostomy into the trachea to keep the opening from closing.

Breathing In

Air we breathe in through our nose and mouth is filtered, warmed, and moistened. It then passes through our throat and voice box (*larynx*), into our trachea and, finally, into our lungs.

With a *tracheostomy*, air goes directly into the trachea, bypassing the nose and mouth.

Breathing Out

Normally, when you breathe out, air goes through the larynx where it makes the vocal cords vibrate, creating sound (voice).

With a tracheostomy, there is a loss of voice because air leaves the body through the *trach* tube and no longer passes through the voice box.

While Your Tracheostomy Is in Place

- Nurses and respiratory therapists will keep your trach clear of mucous by inserting a small tube attached to a suction vacuum through the opening. This will be done until you are able to cough secretions on your own.
- A mist mask will be placed over your trach to add moisture and oxygen to the air you take in.
- The head of your bed will stay raised slightly to help you breathe.
- You will use different ways to communicate, such as writing notes or pointing to pictures or words.

After the tube is changed, you will be able to speak with the trach in place. When it is no longer needed, the tube will be removed and the opening will close on its own.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER
UW Medicine

**Otolaryngology – Head and Neck
Surgery Center**

Box 356161

1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195
206-598-4022

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Center: 206-598-4022