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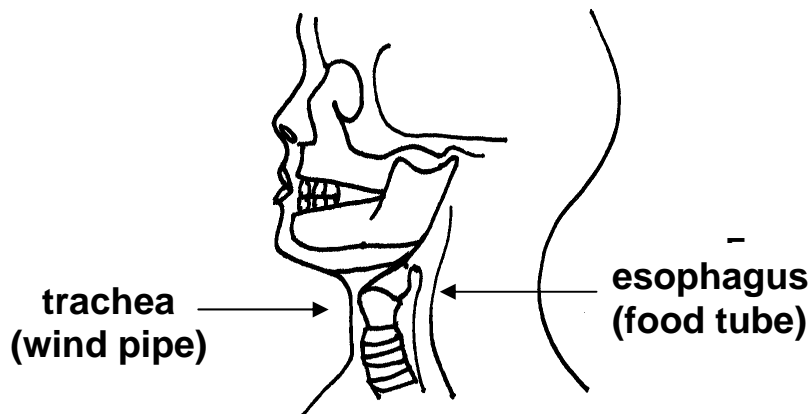
## Tracheostomy for Head and Neck Surgery

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### What is a tracheostomy?

A tracheostomy is an operation which makes an opening through the skin and the wind pipe or trachea in the neck. A plastic or metal tube is placed in the opening. This is done so you will be able to breathe more easily.

A tracheostomy may be needed when airflow is blocked by swelling or a tumour.



A tracheostomy takes about 30 minutes to do. It is usually done under a general anaesthetic so you are asleep. It can also be done safely under a local anaesthetic while you are awake. Your doctor will decide the best method for you.

### What kind of tracheostomy tube will I have?

There are 2 kinds of tubes: plastic or metal. The plastic tube comes in 2 styles: with a balloon or without a balloon. Your doctor decides the best kind for you.

## **Tracheostomy tubes have 3 parts:**

- the **outer cannula** or trach tube
- the **inner cannula** which is a smaller tube placed inside the tracheostomy tube
- the obturator which is only used to put in a new tracheostomy tube

## **How will I feel after surgery?**

After surgery you will go to the recovery room. You will be watched closely by the nurses until you are fully awake. You will be able to breathe much easier. You will not be able to talk after surgery. You will need to use a writing board to communicate.

If you feel pain or have an upset stomach, let the nurses know. You can have medication that will help.

## **On the Head and Neck Unit**

When you are fully awake, you will be taken to the Head and Neck Unit. You will have a call bell beside you to use when you want help. You are closely observed by the nurses.

## **Intravenous**

After surgery, you will have an intravenous called an IV in a vein in your arm. The IV is used to give you fluids until you are feeling better. Medication can also be given through the IV. The nurses make sure the IV is working well and giving you enough fluids.

## **Looking after you**

For the first few days after surgery, the nurses watch you closely. You may have your blood pressure, pulse and respirations taken every 4 hours and then as needed. You will have an oxygen mask placed over the tracheostomy for 24 to 48 hours after surgery. This helps you breathe better. It also keeps the mucous soft so it is easier to cough up secretions.

If you feel that the air is dry when you breathe, talk to your nurse. Your nurse can increase the humidity in the air you breathe and talk to you about this.

## How will I eat?

If you are allowed to eat, you will start fluids the next day. This includes juice, soup, pudding and drinks. As you are able, you begin slowly and progress to a softer textured diet such as casseroles, pasta, mashed potatoes, cooked vegetables and fruit.

If you are not allowed to eat, you will have a feeding tube placed in your nose or through a small incision in your stomach. The tube is put in during your surgery and gives you the nutrition, fluids and medication you need to heal.

Depending on how you are doing, you may begin having formula feedings through the tube the night after surgery or the next day. The amount you have will be increased slowly. The dietitian will be involved with you and the nurses to decide the type and amount of formula you need. When you are able, you will learn how to do your tube feedings yourself if needed.

## How will I communicate?

You will begin to communicate after surgery using a writing board. Later, you may be able to speak by putting a cork or cap into the tracheostomy hole. A cork is used for a metal tube and a cap for a plastic tube.

## Looking after your tracheostomy

The nurses will show you:

- how to look after the tracheostomy
- how to suction through the tracheostomy

They will make sure you can do everything before you go home. You will have a suction machine in your home and a nurse will visit.

**Never suction without the inner cannula in place.**

## Cleaning your mouth

Good mouth care is very important to prevent problems. If you have **not had any mouth surgery**, you need to brush your teeth and gums and keep your mouth clean whether you are eating normally or having tube feedings. You can use a mild mouthwash without alcohol 4 times a day. Do not swallow the mouthwash.

## **What activity can I do?**

After surgery, you need to move around to prevent breathing and circulation problems. Moving also helps you build up your strength and help you recover faster. Within 3 to 6 hours after surgery, you will be helped to sit at the side of your bed. You will also be encouraged to do deep breathing and circulation exercises. When you are out of bed in the hospital, you will need to wear non-slip shoes with full backs and covered toes for safety.

## **Before you go home**

Some people can go home with the tracheostomy tube in. Some people go home after the tracheostomy tube has been taken out and they can breathe through their mouth and nose again. After the tube is taken out, the hole closes and begins to heal. Your needs will depend on whether the tube is in or out.

Your health information will be shared with the Community Care Access Centre or CCAC who arrange help at home. If you are eligible for CCAC services, you may have a visiting nurse, dietitian, personal care worker or physiotherapist. Some equipment and dressing supplies may also be arranged. If you have been in the hospital more than 1 or 2 days, the CCAC Manager may talk to you before you go home.

## **Follow-up with your doctor**

You will be given an appointment to see your surgeon 1 to 3 weeks after you go home. You will also get any prescriptions you need for medications before you leave the hospital.

## **We are here to help**

We are here to help you get home as soon as you are ready. There will be more information and support given to you and your family while you are in the hospital.

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## At Home

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### The Visiting Nurse

The visiting nurse makes sure you are managing at home. The nurse helps you with any problems or questions you have. Your doctor and visiting nurse decide when you no longer need home visits.

### Keep neck clean

The visiting nurse continues to monitor how you are looking after your tracheostomy. The nurse reviews your care with you and your caregiver and answers any questions you have about cleaning and suctioning.

If you feel the air is dry when you breathe you need more humidity. Talk to the visiting nurse about ways to increase humidity in the air you breathe.

### Maintain your nutrition

Healthy eating promotes healing. If you are able to eat and swallow, eat a variety of soft, moist food and follow Canada's Food Guide. You can get a copy by:

- calling: 1-800-267-1245
- emailing: [publications@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:publications@hc-sc.gc.ca)
- website: [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide)

If you have any questions or concerns, call the dietitian at St. Joseph's Hospital 905-522-1155 extension 33509.


You may go home with CCAC dietitian services particularly when you are on a tube feeding. If you have a CCAC dietitian he or she will help you with any other nutrition problems or questions you have.

### Watch for signs of infection

It is normal to have a small amount of blood in your tracheostomy tube. If this continues, however, contact your doctor. You may have a large amount of mucous come out of your tracheostomy tube. If the amount changes or becomes yellow or green, call your doctor.


**You need to watch for these signs of infection around your incision:**


- swelling
- increased redness
- increased amount of mucous or a change in colour
- foul smelling mucous
- increased temperature

** Contact your doctor or the Head and Neck Unit at St. Joseph's Hospital if you have any of these signs.**

### **Who do I call for help?**

If you have questions or concerns, call your surgeon or the Head and Neck Unit at St. Joseph's Hospital.

** Surgeon's number: \_\_\_\_\_**

** Head and Neck Unit: 905-522-1155 ext. 33504**



