

Tracheostomy

What is a Tracheostomy?

A tracheostomy creates a new pathway for air (called an airway) to flow into and out of the lungs when you breathe. To create the airway, surgeons make a small opening in the neck. They place a tracheostomy tube (also called a trach tube) into the opening. Air flows into and out of the lungs through the trach tube instead of your nose and mouth.

Reasons for a Tracheostomy

You may need a tracheostomy if any of these happen:

- Your throat swells and blocks your natural airway. This could be after surgery or from an allergic reaction.
- An object or growth blocks the natural airway.
- Surgery on the throat or mouth area blocks the flow of air.
- Parts of your body that affect your breathing become paralyzed.
- You have a long-term need for machines to help you breathe.

What Happens in a Tracheostomy

A surgeon makes a small opening through the front of the neck into the trachea, which carries air to the lungs. This opening is called a stoma. The surgeon places a trach tube into the stoma. One end of the trach tube rests outside the neck. The other end rests inside the trachea. When you breathe in, air flows through the trach tube into the trachea and to the lungs. When you breathe out, air flows back out the trach tube. Some people need the trach tube for only a short time. Others may need it permanently.

Important Points

- Most patients who have a tracheostomy can get a tube that allows them to speak.
- Most patients can eat normally with a tracheostomy. They need to be extra careful when swallowing.
- When you no longer need the trach tube, a health care provider can remove it with a gentle pull. The stoma usually heals in a few days.

