

**Patient
Information**

Temporary tracheostomy

Introduction

This leaflet provides information about a tracheostomy and why you may need to have one.

What is a tracheostomy?

A tracheostomy is a small hole or opening (stoma) in the front of the neck that goes into the windpipe (trachea). The tracheostomy tube is passed through the hole into the windpipe and is secured in place with straps to create an artificial airway. This will allow the person to breathe through their neck, rather than their nose and mouth.

Why do I need a tracheostomy?

There are many reasons for having a tracheostomy. The most common is to bypass a blockage at the top of the throat. This may be due to swelling following head and neck surgery, a tumour in the throat or voice box or paralysis of the vocal cords. Other reasons may include being connected to a machine that helps you breathe (ventilator) or for clearing phlegm (secretions) from your chest.

What is a tracheostomy tube?

A tracheostomy tube is the tube that passes through your stoma to keep your windpipe open. The tube has 2 main parts and these parts can be removed, cleaned and re-used.

1. **The main outer tube** stays in place permanently, although may need changing if a smaller size tube is needed
2. **The inner tube** is a removable tube that is changed and cleaned regularly to keep the airway clear of secretions

On no account should you or anyone else remove any parts unless specific training has been given.

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**Patient
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No. There are many different types of tracheostomy tubes and your nurse or doctor will advise you on which one you will need.

Is my tracheostomy permanent?

This depends upon the reason for having the tracheostomy. Some tracheostomies are permanent but many are only used as a temporary measure. The length of time you will need your tracheostomy varies from person to person. Your consultant will be able to discuss this with you in more detail.

Will my tracheostomy affect my speech?

Yes. The sound of your voice is created by air passing through your voice box as you breathe out.

This means that while you have a tracheostomy, you may have problems in producing sound.

In many cases a special valve can be connected to the tracheostomy tube which will allow you to speak.

However, if this is not possible a speech and language therapist or a nurse will discuss with you other ways of communicating.

Will a tracheostomy affect the way in which I eat and drink?

Many people with a tracheostomy are able to eat and drink. However, there may be occasions when a person's normal swallow becomes affected. In this instance, a speech and language therapist would carry out an assessment and advise how this could be managed.

Could the tracheostomy stop me from breathing?

No. Tracheostomy tubes are designed to assist breathing. Breathing problems can happen if the tube becomes blocked.

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Your ward nurse will teach you how to care for your tracheostomy.

If you need to go home with a tracheostomy the community nurses will support you.

Further instructions on how to care for your tracheostomy at home will be given to you separately.

Caring for your tracheostomy properly should prevent any problems from happening.

Humidification (the process of moistening air)

Because the air you breathe is very dry, you will need to wear a special moisture device (humidifier) over the tube.

This may be in the form of a Heat Moisture Exchanger (HME) that clicks onto the end of the tube, or a Buchanan® bib that ties around the neck. If you require oxygen therapy then a special oxygen mask that sits over the tube will be provided.

Your nurse will select the most appropriate type of humidification for you.

Suction

Suctioning is an important part of tracheostomy care as it helps clear the secretions from your tube. A narrow tube is inserted (about 15cms) into the tracheostomy and suction is applied while the tube is being withdrawn. This will remove any secretions you are not able to cough up yourself. The procedure takes about 10 seconds to carry out and can be uncomfortable. A ward nurse or physiotherapist will carry out this procedure.

What type of clothing should I wear around my neck?

You can wear any kind of clothing as long as it does not block the end of the tracheostomy tube.

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Can I bathe or swim?

No. On no account should you submerge your neck into water as you will drown.

Contact information

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact a member of your care team who will advise you. Alternatively, contact:

Ward 2b

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 6184

Available 24 hours day

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