



Tracheostomy

Purpose, Indications, Contraindications

Tracheostomy is one of the earliest recorded surgical procedures dating back to 100 BC. It is a procedure where a tract is created between the skin and trachea to help someone breathe better. A tube is placed in that tract to keep it open and to help take care of that person's breathing. Many times, a breathing machine (also known as a ventilator) will be attached to the tube in order to help the person breathe. Tracheostomies are not always permanent and may just be a way to help someone recover more quickly. Typically, a tracheostomy tube can be removed without the need for further surgery.

A doctor may determine someone needs a tracheostomy if that person will require the help of a ventilation machine for a prolonged period of time, to help clean out their lungs, to protect their airway from further damage, to bypass some sort of airway obstruction, or in preparation for some other procedure.

Pre-Procedure Considerations

A tracheostomy offers many advantages over a conventional breathing tube. It improves patient comfort, reduces sedation requirements, allows for better care of the lungs, and reduces the risk of pneumonia. All of these benefits may help someone stop needing a ventilation machine more quickly and decrease the hospital length of stay. Lastly, tracheostomy minimizes the risk of injury to the voice box and trachea that can be caused by a typical breathing tube through the mouth. Tracheostomies are not the best choice for everyone. Your doctor will have a discussion with you about the benefits and risks of a tracheostomy in your specific situation.

Summary of Procedure

There are two different types of tracheostomy procedures that can be performed. Both procedures are safe with comparable complication profiles. The choice of approach should be made on a case-by-case basis. An open tracheostomy is performed by making a small incision in the skin over the trachea. A small hole is then made in the trachea and a tracheostomy tube is placed into the trachea. A second procedure, known as a percutaneous dilatational tracheostomy, is performed by using dilators to sequentially enlarge the trachea in order to place the tracheostomy tube. Both techniques result in a tracheostomy tube being placed through an incision in the neck and into the trachea.

Post-Procedure Guidelines

Care for the tracheostomy tube varies depending on the preferences of the institution. You will be taught how to care for the tracheostomy tube and what to do in the case of an emergency. Most people can speak, eat, and drink with a tracheostomy tube in place but it may take some time before you are able to do so. Once again, circumstances differ depending on each individual's situation.