



Tracheostomy

Tracheostomy is a surgical procedure where a tracheostomy tube is inserted into the Trachea (front of the neck).

There are many varied sizes, shapes of the tubes (figures below)

There are many questions about tracheostomy:

Why: There are many indications to place a tracheostomy tube, including airway obstruction, vocal cord paralysis, severe obstructive sleep apnea, upper airway tumors, however, the most common one is the patient requiring a prolonged time on the ventilator.

What are the benefits: there are many benefits for placing a tracheostomy tube. Patient comfort, less requirement for sedation, ability to swallow, speak, facilitate weaning of the ventilator, facilitate mobility, However, despite the evidence of some benefits, there are no clear survival benefits for tracheostomy.

When (timing) should it be done: There is no “golden time” to perform the procedure, studies showed no difference between early or late placement of tracheostomy. The usual time of performing the procedure in the ICU is 10-14 days in a patient who is difficult to get off the ventilator or deemed to require prolonged time on the ventilator.

How is it done: The procedure is usually performed in the ICU (percutaneously) or the OR (open) by physicians with experts in the procedure.

Is it permanent: that depends on the reason of the tracheostomy, for prolonged need of mechanical ventilation it is usually not permanent and often can be removed (decannulated) if the patient doesn't need the ventilator anymore and deemed able to resume normal breathing again.

Is it dangerous: The procedure is considered safe but keep in mind, no procedures are 100% safe with no risks of complications or death. Complications like bleeding, tracheal ring fractures, air leak around the lung (pneumothorax) are within the range of 1-5% and usually are easily corrected, death has been reported in less than 0.5% of the cases.

How to take care of tracheostomy tube: Taking care of the tracheostomy tube needs some training and better be done by a professional personnel, however family can train on taking care of the tube.

