

## Head and Neck Cancer Team

# What is a Tracheostomy?

A tracheostomy is an artificial opening (stoma) below the larynx (voice box) into your trachea (windpipe). A surgical cut is made into your trachea, creating an airway and allowing you to breathe; this procedure is called a tracheotomy. A curved tube (called a tracheostomy tube) is then inserted through the opening into the trachea to help you breathe.

### Most common reasons for a Tracheostomy

- Helping you to breathe if there is a blockage at the top of the throat
- During head and neck surgery
- To help in artificial ventilation

The need for a tracheostomy will depend on your individual needs, but may be performed either in an emergency, or as part of a planned process such as head and neck surgery.

### Head and Neck Surgery

If you need a tracheostomy because you are having surgery to the head and neck, this will usually be removed after the swelling from the surgery site has reduced, and your consultant is happy for the tube to be removed.

### Communication

Whilst you have a tracheostomy tube in place you will probably find it difficult to speak. The voice is normally produced when air passes through the larynx (voice box), causing the vocal cords to vibrate and creating a sound. The tracheostomy prevents this vibration because the tube sits below your larynx (voice box) and stops air from flowing through the voice box.



## Patient Information

Whilst the tracheostomy tube is in place, you may need to use other methods of communication such as writing, mouthing words or a communication picture chart.

### Head and Neck Support Team

If you require any further information or advice after reading this leaflet, don't hesitate to contact the Head and Neck Support Team:

Paul Worrall, Macmillan Head & Neck Clinical Nurse Specialist

Mary McGowan, Head & Neck Specialist Nurse

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The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the head and neck support team on 024 7696 6452 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

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