



# Central West Specialists

Ear, Nose & Throat Specialist

## TRACHEOSTOMY

This is an operation that requires opening the windpipe below the voice box to secure safe breathing. It is almost invariably done in the hospital setting, with people that are severely ill and requiring ventilation to support their breathing. Most of the patients having this type of procedure have been ill for quite some time in the intensive care unit. So this information sheet is primarily for the relatives.

This is done under a short general anaesthetic. The windpipe is opened through a small horizontal incision in the neck and a plastic tube is inserted in the windpipe. This helps protect the lungs from other secretions and allows the lungs to be treated more effectively if there is any infection below.

There are some risks for this procedure but they are very low. The operation can also be done as a per-cutaneous procedure in the intensive care unit but if the access is difficult then the open procedure is done. The risk of this operation is small. Bleeding is the main risk but this is extremely rare. There are nerves that supply the larynx which are quite important, but they are well out of the operative site and they are at minimal risk.

The tube inside the larynx is kept there for approximately a week and after this can be changed as necessary. When the tracheostomy tube is eventually removed it can take several weeks for the area to close over. A small scar, which eventually fades will be then noticeable.

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