What Is a Tracheostomy?
A tracheostomy creates a new pathway for air to flow into and out of the lungs. To create this pathway, surgeons make a small opening in the neck. They place a tracheostomy tube (also called a trach tube) into the opening. Air flows into and out of the lungs through the trach tube.

Reasons for a Tracheostomy
A tracheostomy may be needed in these situations:
- Swelling of the throat that blocks the airway (such as an allergic reaction or after surgery)
- An object or growth that blocks the throat or trachea
- Surgery on the larynx or mouth area
- Paralysis of the abdomen, chest, neck, or throat that affects breathing
- Need for long-term ventilation

How a Tracheostomy Works
Surgeons make a small opening through the front of the neck into the trachea, which carries air to the lungs. This opening is called a stoma. A trach tube is placed into the stoma. One end of the trach tube rests outside the neck. The other end rests inside the trachea. When you breathe in, air flows through the trach tube into the trachea and to the lungs. When you breathe out, air flows back out the trach tube. Some people need the trach tube for only a short time, while others may need it permanently.

Important Points
- Most patients who have a tracheostomy can be fitted with a tube that allows them to speak.
- Most patients can eat normally with a tracheostomy, but some precautions are needed.
- When no longer needed, a trach tube can be removed by gently pulling on it. The stoma will generally heal in a few days.