

Let's Talk About...

Endotracheal Tube

An endotracheal (end-oh-TRAY-key-ul) tube is a clear, flexible tube about as wide as your child's little finger. It is like a straw and with an opening on each end for oxygen to pass through. If your child has a hard time breathing or stops breathing, he may need an endotracheal tube so air can pass in and out of the lungs.

The endotracheal tube is often called an "ET tube." Intubate (in-to-bate) is the word for putting an endotracheal tube through the mouth or nose into the lungs. Extubate (ex-to-bate) is the word for removing the endotracheal tube when your child doesn't need it any more.

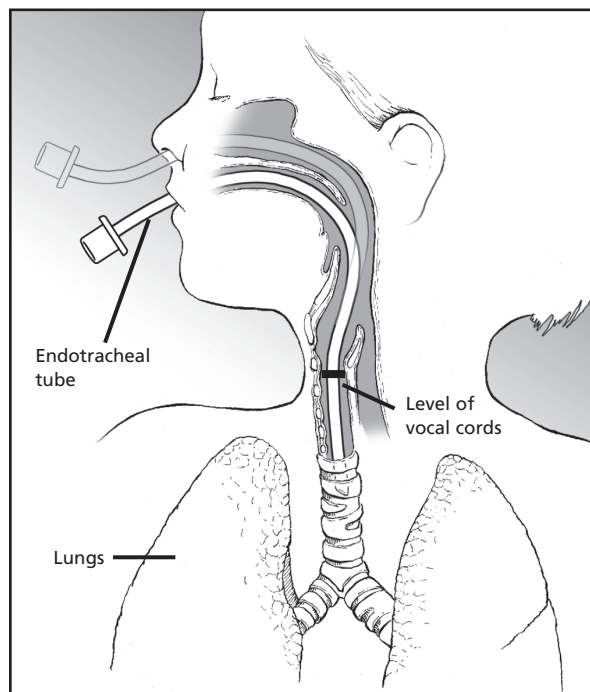
Why would my child need an endotracheal tube?

Here are some reasons your child may need an endotracheal tube:

- Heavy sedation
- Severe problems breathing
- An object stuck in his airway
- A severe head injury
- The airway didn't grow properly and required a surgical procedure
- An injury to the lungs, mouth, or throat
- Severe swelling in his mouth or throat

How is the endotracheal tube put in place?

There are two ways the tube can be put in place. The tube can be put into the mouth to the back of the throat and just past the vocal cords. Another way the tube could be put into place is into the nose to the back of the throat and past the vocal cords. The tube is held in place by tape



on your child's nose or just above the upper lip and across the cheeks.

While your child has an endotracheal tube he will not be able to speak or make sounds. This is because the tube passes between the vocal cords. Your child will receive medicine to keep him still when the tube is in place, and your child may not be able to move temporarily because of the medicine. The nurses may need to use soft cloth restraints on your child's wrists so he won't touch the ET tube while it is in place.

The endotracheal tube will be attached to a machine called a ventilator that can help your child breathe. He can breathe on his own or have help from the ventilator. How much the ventilator helps him breathe depends on his illness or why he has the endotracheal tube. Ask your child's nurse or respiratory therapist how much help the ventilator gives your child.