INTUBATION/MECHANICAL VENTILATION

What is an ET tube?

An ET (endotracheal tube) is a tube that goes between the vocal cords and into the trachea (the breathing tube that goes into the lungs.) "Intubated" is the word that means "placing a tube down to the lungs."

Why am I unable to talk or eat or drink with this tube in?

The "cuff"* or balloon at the end of the tube does not allow air to pass through the "voice box" (vocal cords), mouth, or nose, so the patient cannot talk. The tube also blocks the epiglottis which is a flap-like tissue that prevents fluids or food from going into the lungs. For this reason, the patient is not allowed to drink or eat.

*Children 2 years old and younger do not have a cuff or balloon on the end of the endotracheal tube.

What is a ventilator?

The ventilator (breathing machine) helps a person with breathing difficulty to breathe without as much effort. The ventilator can also breath for the patient to allow the patient to rest and promote healing. Slowly, the patient is weaned from the amount of assistance that the machine gives, until the patient receives oxygen only. The doctor will then consider extubation (taking the tube out). After approximately 2-3 weeks, if the patient still needs breathing assistance from the ventilator, or if the doctor does not think that the person will be able to
breathe or cough well enough without help, a "tracheostomy" may be ordered.