

Doctors replace Giffords' breathing tube

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In this Jan. 5, 2011 file photo, House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio reenacts the swearing in of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2011, on Capitol Hill in Washington. Giffords is in critical condition after being shot in the head in her district in Arizona Saturday, Jan. 8, 2011. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File)

(AP) -- Doctors on Saturday removed Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' breathing tube and could soon know if she can speak.

Giffords had an operation Saturday to replace the breathing tube with a tracheotomy tube in her windpipe. That allows her to breathe better and frees her from the [ventilator](#).

Though Giffords had been breathing on her own since she was shot in

the head Jan. 8, doctors had left the breathing tube in as a precaution. A [feeding tube](#) was also put in to provide nutrition. Those procedures are not out of the ordinary for brain-injured patients.

Giffords' doctors have said they should be able to evaluate her ability to speak once the [breathing tube](#) is out.

Giffords, who was wounded in last weekend's attack that killed six people, remains in critical condition at University Medical Center.

"Her recovery continues as planned," the hospital said in a statement.

Her husband, astronaut Mark Kelly, has remained by her bedside.

One patient was discharged Saturday while two others remain in good condition.

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