

Giffords continues to heal, show signs of recovery

By Amanda Gardner, U.S. News & World Report

Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords continues her remarkable recovery after she was gravely wounded by an assassin's bullet to her brain nine days ago: On Sunday, her doctors upgraded her condition from critical to serious.

Giffords underwent surgery Saturday to replace a breathing tube that had been in place since she was shot in the attack in Tucson that left six people dead.

The 40-year-old Giffords was breathing on her own, but the breathing tube had been left in as a precaution. In its place, surgeons inserted a tracheotomy tube in her windpipe, protecting her airway and allowing her to be disconnected from a ventilator, according to officials at University Medical Center in Tucson, where Giffords is being treated.

Doctors also inserted a feeding tube. Both procedures, according to the hospital, are common in people hospitalized with brain injuries.

The hospital issued a statement saying that Giffords' "recovery continues as planned."

Giffords can't talk because of the breathing tube, but her husband reported Monday that she has improved so much that she was able to smile and give him a neck rub as he sat by her side, according to the *Associated Press*.

"She's ...gone through this traumatic injury," astronaut Mark Kelly said in an interview with *ABC News* anchor Diane Sawyer. "And she spends 10 minutes giving me a neck massage. It's so typical of her that no matter how hard the situation might be

for her, you know, she's looking out for other people."

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