Laryngectomy Care

This sheet tells you how to take care of yourself after your surgery. Please ask us if you have questions about anything this sheet tells you to do.

What is a Stoma?
If your larynx was removed during the surgery, known as a laryngectomy, you’ll continue to breathe through the hole in your throat. This hole is called a stoma or permanent tracheostomy. You’ll be shown how to care for your stoma. Support groups can help you adjust to having a new airway, and you can return to work, family life, and many of the activities you enjoyed before surgery.

Things to Remember at Home

1. Never go swimming and never put food or medicine down the neck opening or stoma.
2. Use a room or bedside humidifier, HME, place pans of water around the house, or run a hot shower to help keep the air damp. Plants in the house also help keep the air damp.
3. Don’t pick up heavy objects. Ask someone to lift them for you.
4. Don’t strain when you have a bowel movement. There are some things you can do so you won’t get constipated.
   • Drink 6-8 glasses of water each day.
   • Eat more raw fruits and vegetables.
   • Eat more cereals and breads that are high in fiber.
   • Ask your doctor about a stool softner or laxative.
5. Remember to cover your stoma when you cough or sneeze.
6. Wear a stoma shield when you take a shower or aim the shower head below the stoma.
7. Men should cover the stoma when shaving.
8. You may cough up bloody, dry mucus when the weather is very cold. Irrigate your stoma more often when that happens.
9. You won’t suffocate if a blanket or clothing happens to cover your stoma.
10. You will be able to smell and taste a little better as time passes. It’s a good idea to get smoke and gas detectors for your house.
11. Wear a MedicAlert bracelet and carry a medical emergency card with you.
Help with Speaking
If you have your larynx removed, it will change the way you speak, but you can speak again. A Speech pathologist can help you use one or more of the following:

- An electrolarynx (Servox), a device like a microphone that you hold up to your throat when you want to talk
- Esophageal speech, which creates speech using air forced up from your esophagus
- Voice prosthesis, a special valve placed inside your throat to help you speak. The procedure to place the valve is called a tracheoesophageal puncture (TEP).

How to clean around the neck opening
1. Use a wash cloth with warm water to wipe away the dried mucus. Don’t use Q-tips or other cotton swabs to clean around your stoma.
2. Use tweezers to pull off crusted areas around the opening.
3. You can wear a stoma bib to keep dust and other things in the air from getting into your neck opening.
4. See sheet on “Suctioning Laryngectomy Patients” for information on irrigating and suctioning your stoma.

Notify your doctor if any of the following symptoms occur:
1. Bad smell from wound
2. Shaking or chills
3. Upset stomach or vomiting that lasts more than 12 hours
4. Bleeding from stoma
5. Difficulty breathing