

Speech and language therapy service

Travelling abroad after laryngectomy surgery

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet explains some of the issues you may come across when travelling after laryngectomy surgery. If you still have questions, please ask your speech and language therapist (SLT).

Can I travel abroad after laryngectomy surgery?

Yes, but there are a number of things we would encourage you to think about beforehand. We suggest:

- that you identify a local hospital in the area you are visiting which has an ear, nose and throat (ENT) department familiar with laryngectomy surgery (please ask your SLT as they may be able to help with this)
- check your travel insurance to make sure your laryngectomy surgery is covered as a pre-existing condition for the country you are visiting

What equipment should I pack?

You should take enough supplies of cleaning wipes, baseplates and heat moisture exchange (HME) or humidification devices for the duration of your trip. It is also useful to have equipment with you in the unlikely event that your voice prosthesis (valve) becomes dislodged. Please refer to our leaflet on emergency management of your voice prosthesis for more information on how to manage this should it occur.

We recommend you take the following items:

- dilator or stent
- catheter
- spare valve if you are going away for more than two weeks
- spare laryngectomy tube or stoma button if you use one
- shower guard
- emergency wallet card from Countrywide Supplies or the National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs (NALC)
- a copy of your prescription medications list

How should I look after my stoma when flying?

The air on board aeroplanes contains less moisture and the oxygen pressure is lower than on the ground. This colder, drier air may irritate your lungs and cause more mucous to be produced.

You should wear a humidification device over your stoma on board an aeroplane. Your SLT can show you some of the different devices that offer more protection.

If you choose to wear a laryngectomy bib, it is a good idea to have a water spray bottle with you and to regularly spray water onto the bib to add moisture to the air you are breathing in.

You should also drink plenty of water and avoid caffeine or alcohol, which cause dehydration.

Remember to pack the equipment needed during the flight in your carry-on luggage.

How should I look after my stoma when abroad?

You should look after your stoma in the same way you usually do. You may find in countries that are warmer or colder than the UK that the mucous you produce becomes thicker or stickier. Wearing a humidification device with extra protection may help this.

If you are in a hot country remember to use a sun cream with SPF 50 around your neck, stoma and any other surgical scars.

What should I do if I have a problem with my valve?

Flying or travelling abroad should not have an impact on the length of your valve. If you notice your valve looks too long or too short, contact the speech and language therapy department when you return home. We will make an appointment for you to come in to have the valve changed as soon as possible.

If you are having difficulty speaking after travelling, try cleaning the valve thoroughly with your cleaning brush. In many cases, cleaning will remove mucous that has become trapped in the middle or at the back end of the valve which may be stopping air getting through.

You can also try drinking fizzy or warm liquids to wash away any food that might be blocking the valve in the food pipe. You may need to clean the valve a few times before your voice comes back. If your voice doesn't come back after cleaning, please contact us by email to request an appointment for when you return to the UK.

If the valve is leaking when you drink, clean it with the brush as this may stop it leaking. If the valve continues to leak after cleaning and you are not returning to the UK immediately, you should contact the local hospital familiar with laryngectomy care where you are and arrange to have the valve changed. It is important to resolve the issue because if liquids keep leaking through the valve when you drink, they will enter your lungs and you may develop a chest infection. It is more common for liquids to leak than foods.

If you find that there is no leakage of foods you can carry on eating. Try foods with high water content such as soup, fruit smoothies, yoghurt, custard or jelly to stay hydrated until the valve can be changed.

Before you travel ask your SLT about valve inserts, which can be used to stop leakages, so you can still eat and drink until you get the valve changed.

It is possible there will be a cost associated with treatment in a different country and this is something you should check before you travel.

How do I find out more information?

If you have any questions please contact the speech and language therapy service on: 020 3331 0333 or email imperial.lary@nhs.net.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk