

Speech and language therapy service:

Charing Cross, Hammersmith and St Mary's hospitals

# Looking after your neck stoma after laryngectomy surgery

## Information for patients

### Introduction

This leaflet explains what a neck stoma is and how to look after it. Please ask your clinical nurse specialist or speech and language therapist if you have any questions.

### What is a neck stoma?

A neck stoma is a permanent opening in your neck made as part of the surgery to remove your larynx (voice box) – a laryngectomy. **After surgery, you will no longer breathe through your nose and mouth as you did before. You will breathe only through the stoma.**



Source: Macmillan Cancer Support

After surgery the stoma will look swollen and may be sore to touch. Whilst it is healing, we may give you a small plastic tube called a laryngectomy tube to wear in it. This helps keep the stoma open at the right size so you can breathe easily. You may need to wear the tube during the daytime, at night when you are asleep, or both. As the stoma heals and the swelling goes down, you may be able to wear the tube less. We will teach you how to put the tube in and tell you when to wear it.

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## How do I look after my stoma after surgery?

Whilst you are in hospital, we will show you how to clean and care for your stoma. It is important to begin taking an active part in caring for your stoma in the days after surgery so that you are able to look after it yourself before you go home.

You will need to clean the area around the stoma at least once a day. You may need to do this more often in the days after surgery. We will show you how to use plastic tweezers to remove any loose crusts or mucous using a mirror. Clean the area around the stoma with a damp cloth. Avoid dropping water directly into the stoma as this will make you cough and can be unpleasant.

## Coughing up mucous (phlegm)

When you cough, you will notice that mucous comes out of the stoma rather than through your mouth. Practice covering your stoma with a tissue when you cough instead of your mouth. It is helpful to look at the stoma in a mirror to see whether there is any mucous left on the skin after coughing.

## Can I have a shower or bath?

It is safer to take a shower than a bath. We will give you a white plastic shower protector that must be worn when taking a shower to keep the water away from the stoma. Taking a bath can be dangerous because the water may enter the stoma and fill your lungs making you unable to breathe. This can happen quite suddenly if you move or slip down accidentally in the bath.

## Should I cover the stoma?

Yes, you should always keep the stoma covered using a specialist humidification device. This is because the air around us is colder and drier than we realise. Before surgery, the air we breathe through our nose and mouth is filtered and warmed and moisture is added before it reaches the lungs. This process is called humidification. After laryngectomy surgery, air is breathed directly into the lungs through the stoma without humidification. This cold, dry air irritates the lungs and causes more mucous to be produced which needs to be coughed out.

It is important that you always wear a humidification device over your stoma to protect and moisten the air entering your lungs. There are a range of humidification devices available. The most common options are a heat moisture exchange system, or a foam protector. We will help you choose the right one for you.

## How do I look after my stoma when I go home?

We suggest you follow this routine to look after your stoma when you first go home.

	Morning	Lunchtime	Afternoon	Before bed
Clean the stoma if mucous is present	✓	✓	✓	✓
Moisturise the neck	✓			✓

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Before you leave hospital, we will talk to you about the equipment you need to look after your stoma. We will order the equipment for you and it will be delivered to your home.

## What should I do if my stoma starts to get smaller?

It is normal for the stoma to shrink a little as the swelling goes down. It is good to get used to looking at the size of your stoma in the mirror. If you are concerned that your stoma is getting smaller, speak to your clinical nurse specialist or speech and language therapist.

If you feel your stoma is getting smaller and you have a laryngectomy tube, put the tube into the stoma as you did when you were in hospital.

**If you're having difficulty breathing or your breathing sounds noisy and you don't have a laryngectomy tube, or if the stoma is too small to put the tube in, go immediately to your nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department or ask someone to call 999 for you.**

## Can I go swimming with the stoma?

No, it is not safe to go swimming or enter deep water without using specialist equipment to stop water going into your lungs. If you are interested in finding out more about swimming after laryngectomy surgery, speak to your speech and language therapist.

## How do I find out more information?

If you have any questions please call the speech and language therapy service on **020 3331 0333** or you can 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 and Hammersmith hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's Hospital). 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 express your concerns in writing to:

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

## 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.patient.information@nhs.net**

We have a free and premium wi-fi service at each of our five hospitals. For further information please visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)