

Laryngectomy Home Care for Adults

University of Iowa Health Care
Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery



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My Personal Record

I have a laryngectomy because: _____

Call 911 if you have an emergency.

Call UI Health Care at:

- 319 – 356 – 2201 Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Ask to talk with the otolaryngology triage nurse.
- 1 – 800 – 777 – 8442 nights, weekends, and holidays
Ask to talk with the otolaryngologist on call.

My UI Health Care doctor's name is: _____

Other emergency phone numbers are:

My local doctor's name and phone number is: _____

My medical supply company name and phone number is:

My visiting nurse agency name and phone number is:



Introduction

Your care team is sending you home with a laryngectomy. You, and a family member or friend, will learn how to take care of it.

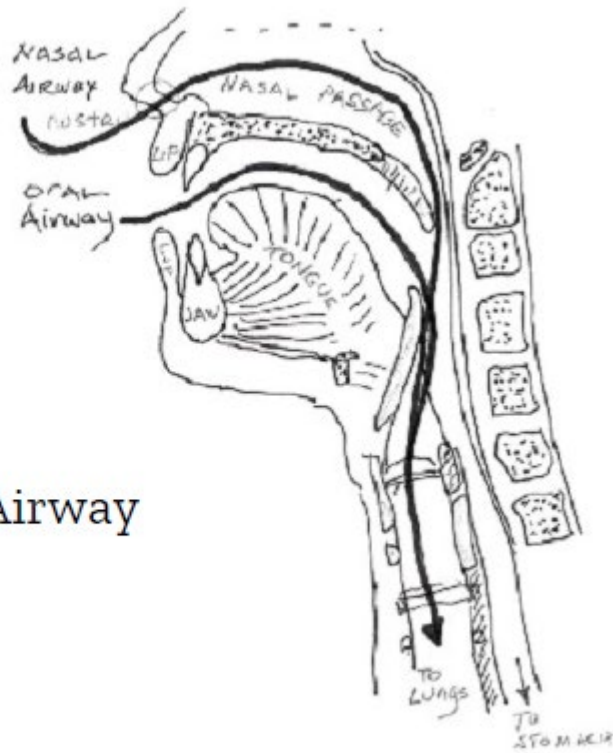
What is a laryngectomy?

A laryngectomy is a surgery to remove (take out) part or all of your voice box (your larynx). Your larynx is found at the top of your windpipe.

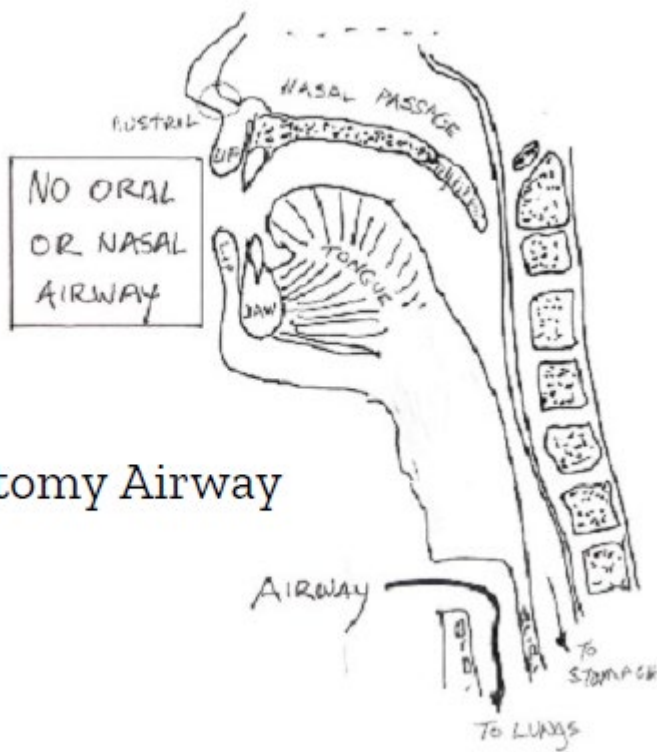
How will a laryngectomy change my body?

- There will be a hole (opening) in your neck after your surgery. This opening is called a stoma.
- The stoma is made during surgery. It connects the end of your windpipe to the opening on your neck. This is how air will go into your lungs so you can breathe.
- You will breathe through your stoma after surgery, not through your nose or mouth.
- You will learn a new way to talk after surgery. This is because your voice box will be gone.
 - A speech therapist will teach you other ways to speak or talk.
 - You may need to write notes until you learn how to speak after surgery.
- You should be able to keep doing your normal activities after surgery. You should be able to keep working unless your job:
 - Is very dusty.
 - Has very hot or cold temperatures.
 - Has other things that will make it hard to breathe.
- You may have other changes after surgery, such as not being able to:
 - Smell or taste as well.
 - Blow your nose.
 - Hold your breath.
 - Warm, dampen, or filter the air you breathe.

Normal Airway



Laryngectomy Airway



How do I keep my stoma open and healthy?

Humidification

When people do not have a stoma, their nose and mouth warm and humidify (moisten) the air they breathe. When you have a stoma, the air no longer goes through your nose or mouth. This means the air you breathe is not moistened (wet). You will need to add extra moisture to your airway so your secretions can be removed by suctioning or coughing.

Get moisture by:

- Using humidifiers (appliance or device that adds moisture to the air).
- Drinking plenty of fluids (if okay with your care team).

You will need more humidity when:

- It is winter and your home is dry.
- Your secretions are thick, dry, or crusty.
- Your secretions are pink or have a little bit of blood in them.

Put an ultrasonic nebulizer or cool-mist humidifier where you sleep. This helps keep the air moist.

Heat moisture exchanger (HME)

Some people do well with a heat moisture exchanger device. This helps trap moisture.



Humidifier

Use a clean humidifier.

Humidifier care: each day

1. Empty and clean the humidifier tub with hot, soapy water.
2. Rinse well.
3. Fill with fresh tap water.
 - Never add water to the humidifier without cleaning the tub.

Humidifier care: each week

1. Empty the humidifier tub and rinse well.
2. Fill the humidifier tub with equal parts vinegar and water (such as 1 cup vinegar and 1 cup water, 2 cups vinegar and 2 cups water).
3. Turn the humidifier on for 1 hour.
4. Place the humidifier in an empty room. The vinegar has a strong smell.
5. Empty the humidifier tub and wash all the parts with hot, soapy water.
6. Rinse well.
7. Fill the humidifier tub with clean water and turn it on for 1 more hour.
8. Empty the humidifier tub and let it air dry.
9. Fill the humidifier tub with fresh tap water when you are ready to use it.

Using saline solution

Saline solution is made with salt and water.

Get a container ready to store the saline solution:

1. Wash the container and the cap in hot, soapy water.
or
2. Place the open container and cap in the dishwasher on its hottest and longest running cycle.
3. Fill the container with boiling water.
4. Let it sit for 5 minutes.
 - Do not touch the inside of the container or cap.
 - Dump the water out.
5. Fill it with the saline solution.

Make saline solution:

1. Boil a quart (4 cups) of water for 5 minutes.
2. Add 1 ½ teaspoons (tsp) of **non-iodized** salt to the water.
3. Pour the mixture into the clean container and cover with the cap.
4. Let the saline solution cool to room temperature before using.

Throw away the saline solution after 24 hours because germs may grow.

You need these supplies to put saline solution into your stoma:

- Saline solution
- Syringe
- Clean cup
- Strong paper towel or gauze sponge
 - Do not use facial tissues.

Putting saline solution into your stoma:

- Pour 2 to 3 tablespoons (tbsp) of saline solution into a clean cup.
- Draw up 2 to 3 milliliters (mL) of saline solution into a syringe.
- While taking a deep breath, put the saline solution into your stoma.
- Cough while you cover your stoma with a strong paper towel or gauze sponge.
- Keep doing this until your airway is clear.
 - You may need to use suction if you cannot cough out your secretions.

Wash the cup and syringe with hot, soapy water each day. Rinse them well and let them air dry.

Use the saline solution more often when your secretions are thick and dry.

Other ways to keep secretions thin and loose

- Fill your bathtub with hot water. Sit in the steam-filled bathroom for 20 minutes.
- Stand in the shower with water pointed away from your stoma.
- Fill a spray bottle with new saline solution. Spray the saline solution into your stoma a few times each day.

Other ways to keep my stoma healthy

- Wash your hands before and after touching your stoma or supplies. People have many germs on their hands.
- Always use clean supplies.

How do I suction my stoma?

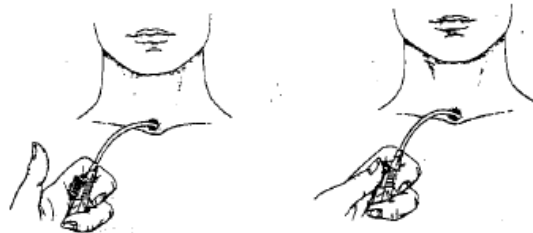
Suctioning gets rid of secretions that you cannot cough out or clear from your airway. It keeps your airway open and helps you breathe better.

You will need these supplies:

- Suction catheter (**keep the package**)
- Connection tubing
- Suction machine
- Clean tap water

To suction:

1. Turn on the suction machine with the pressure set on the low-to-medium setting.
2. Connect the suction catheter to the tubing on the suction machine.
3. Dip the suction catheter tip into the clean tap water.
4. Take 4 to 5 deep breaths.
5. Gently put the suction catheter into your stoma as far as you can without forcing it.
 - Do not cover the suction control vent with your thumb while putting the catheter into your stoma.
6. Pull the suction catheter back out a little bit before you start to suction.
7. Cover the suction control vent with your thumb to start suctioning. Do not suction for more than 10 seconds each time. Turn or twist the suction catheter as it is taken out.
 - Take your thumb off the suction control vent if you feel the catheter pull during suctioning.
 - Wait 20 to 30 seconds between each suction try.
 - After 3 tries, wait 5 to 10 minutes before suctioning again.



Thumb off the suction control vent.

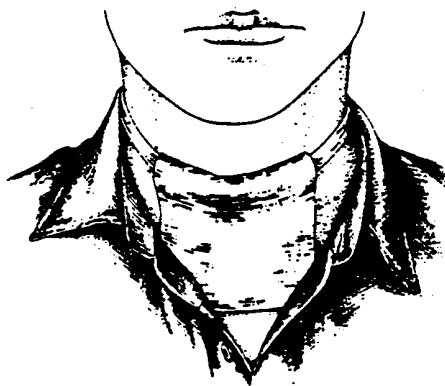
Thumb covering the suction control vent. Now you are suctioning.

How do I clean and store my suction supplies?

- Rinse the suction catheter and connection tubing with clean tap water after each use.
- Store the catheter in the original package until the next use.
- Do **not** reuse the catheter if it touches anything else.
- A suction catheter should be used for as long as your medical supply company tells you, unless you have an infection.
 - If you have an infection, the suction catheter needs to be changed more often.
- The suction machine needs to be kept clean. Empty and clean the bottle and tubing with hot, soapy water each day. Always rinse with clean tap water and let it air dry.

How do I care for the skin around my stoma?

- The skin around your stoma should be kept clean and dry.
- Use cotton-tipped applicators (Q-tips®) or a damp washcloth to clean around the stoma.
- Use a thin layer of petroleum jelly, such as Vaseline®, to stop crusting around the stoma. Do not use petroleum jelly if you have a stoma vent.
- Cover your stoma to keep dust, insects, or other things out of your stoma.
- Cover your stoma with an all-gauze square folded over twill tape. Then tie it around your neck. Make sure you can still breathe with the covering.
 - There are different types of covers for your stoma. Ask your care team for a list.



What is a stoma vent?

- Over time, your stoma may get smaller. A tube (stoma vent) can be used to keep your airway open.
- The stoma vent is useful because it helps keep the stoma edges clean. Your care team will pick the best stoma vent size for you.



How do I care for my stoma vent?

- Make sure your stoma is clear of secretions.
- Put clean ties into the holes on the outside edges of the vent. See the picture above.
- Dampen the vent with saline solution or a water-soluble gel (K-Y Jelly®). This will help you slide the vent into your stoma.
- Put the vent into your stoma and tie the ties around your neck.
- If you have a stoma vent, do not use petroleum jelly (Vaseline®). Petroleum may destroy the stoma vent.
- Clean the vent at least 2 times each day.
 - Clean the inside of your vent with a brush or pipe cleaners. Wash it out with mild soap and water. Rinse well under running tap water.
- Do not use the vent if it is broken, cracked, or does not fit.

How can I stay safe with my stoma?

- Keep water out of your stoma when you shower or take a bath. Do not swim.
- Stay away from powders, aerosol sprays (sprays small drops or mist), and lint from facial tissues (Kleenex®).
- Stay away from dust, sand, cigarette smoke, and other smoke. Do not smoke.
- Cover your stoma with a scarf or HME if:
 - You are in cold weather.
 - It is windy.
 - You will be near sand or dust.
- Do not use facial tissues (like Kleenex®) to cover your stoma. These can come apart and fall into your stoma.
- Do not use over-the-counter cold medicines. These may dry out your secretions and airway.
- Make sure you drink plenty of fluids and have enough humidity to keep your secretions thin and loose.
- Suction often and deep enough to keep your stoma clear of secretions.

Helpful tips

- You will not be able to taste or smell after surgery. You should brush your teeth 2 or more times a day to stop bad breath.
- You may be able to eat and drink after surgery.
- To help with constipation:
 - Eat high fiber foods each day if okay with your care team. Fresh fruits, vegetables, bran, whole grain bread, and cereals are good sources of fiber.
 - Exercise.
 - Drink plenty of liquids.
 - Use a laxative as a last resort. A laxative is a medicine that treats hard or dry poop. This helps a person have a bowel movement (poop).

What should I know before I leave the hospital?

- A nurse may be asked to help you when you go home.
- You can find your supplies at a drug store or medical supply company.

What supplies will I need at home?

- You will need to get a suction machine before you leave the hospital. Most patients rent a suction machine.
- You will also need a humidifier at home.

You will be sent home with:

- 1 quart of saline solution
- 2 syringes (5 mL each) to use with saline solution
- 2 containers to store saline solution
- 1 pack of gauze squares to use for coughing. You can also use strong paper towels.
- 2 suction catheters and tubing for your suction machine (if not supplied by your medical supply company)
- Cotton-tipped applicators (1 package of extra-long)
- Stoma vent if given by Speech Pathology
- 2 Velcro®-like straps or twill tape

What if I have problems with my stoma or breathing?

Call your care team if you have:

- Trouble breathing or noisy breathing (congestion)
- Dry, crusted secretions (mucus plugs) or blood-colored secretions from your stoma
- More secretions or drainage than normal from your stoma
- Thick, bad-smelling, yellow or green secretions
- Chest pain
- Trouble putting your vent in because your stoma size has gotten smaller
- A temperature of 101 °F (38.3 °C) or higher
- Redness, skin breakdown, or swelling around your stoma
- Bleeding around your stoma
- Trouble swallowing or eating

How can I be ready for an emergency?

- It may be hard to talk on the phone. Post this information near your phone:
 - Emergency phone numbers and other important phone numbers
 - Your name
 - Your address
- Know emergency phone numbers wherever you are.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet or necklace or both.
 - Get these from a pharmacy.
 - They let people know that you breathe through a stoma. The stoma should be used as your airway if you need oxygen or CPR.



Medical alert bracelet

American Cancer Society sponsored groups

The American Cancer Society sponsors groups that may help you after surgery. There are many small groups called "Lost Chord Clubs" all over the United States.

For more information, contact the American Cancer Society - Iowa Division.

- 8364 Hickman Road
Des Moines, Iowa 50322
- Phone: 1 – 800 – 227 – 2345

