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# How to Look After Your Stoma After Laryngectomy Surgery



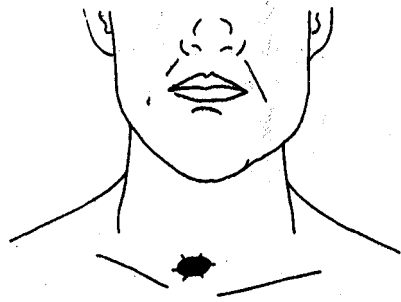
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## What is a laryngectomy stoma?

A laryngectomy stoma is an opening or hole in your neck made by surgery.

You breathe through this hole after you have laryngectomy surgery.



## How do I look after my stoma?

### Check your stoma:

Each morning and 2 to 3 times throughout the day, you should check your stoma. Check around the stoma and inside the trachea for mucous and crusts. You may need to use a flashlight to check your stoma.

### Clean your stoma:

The skin around your stoma needs to be clean and free from secretions to avoid irritation and problems.

Gently wash the skin around your stoma with mild soap and water. Use a clean face cloth each time you clean your stoma. Clean the inside lip of the stoma using cotton-tipped swabs soaked in hydrogen peroxide.

Avoid fluffy material such as cotton balls. These may get sucked into your breathing tube or trachea and cause breathing problems.

- In the winter, cover your stoma to avoid breathing cold air.
- Do not worry about blankets and covers. Your natural instinct will prevent you from suffocating.
- **You cannot swim with a stoma.**
- Avoid becoming constipated as you cannot bear down or strain. Eating foods high in fibre and drinking fluids can make your bowel movements softer. Foods high in fibre include whole-wheat products, fresh fruits and vegetables. Exercise also helps to prevent constipation.
- Talk to your doctor before you take non-prescribed medications. Medications such as antihistamines, decongestants and ones with alcohol in them may dry your stoma.

## Keep your breath clean:

You often have bad breath after a laryngectomy. This is caused by a build-up of debris on your tongue since you do not breathe the same way. Brush your tongue gently with a soft toothbrush and use mouthwash often.

## Extra caution is needed:

- Be careful not to get soap or lather in your stoma when you shave.
- Be careful that you do not cut your neck when you shave. Your neck will be numb for about 6 months until the nerve endings begin to grow again.
- Avoid getting aerosol spray, perfumed sprays or after shave lotion into the trachea.
- Avoid getting sunburned. Your skin around your neck will be sensitive to the sun.
- Use a stoma bib to protect against insects, sand and dirt.
- Turn on the light to use paper tissues at night. This will help prevent tissue from being sucked into your trachea.
- Do not use cotton or cotton-filled gauze to clean. The fibres may get sucked into your trachea.

## Keep your stoma moist:

Use a thin layer of K-Y Gel<sup>®</sup> to keep the skin around the stoma moist.

✘ Do not put K-Y Gel inside the stoma.

Gel can:

- plug the hole
- make it hard to breathe
- cause an infection
- make it hard to see problems

## Cover your stoma:

Covering your stoma:

- keeps the stoma clean and healthy
- prevents particles in the air from going down your breathing tube
- warms the air before it goes into your lungs
- increases the amount of moisture you breathe in

A stoma cover is called a bib. It is a small crocheted cloth tied around your neck. There are many styles and types of bibs. They can be made to suit you. You can get bibs from the:

- Canadian Cancer Society or
  - Head and Neck Unit at St. Joseph's Hospital
- You can also wear scarves, turtlenecks or a shirt and tie to cover your stoma as long as they do not make it hard for you to breathe.

## **Remove crusts or plugs of mucous:**

Cover your stoma at night with a moistened bib.

This will:

- absorb secretions
- provide humidity to breathe
- reduce stoma noise

When you have a build up of mucous in your trachea, try to cough it out. You may need to put a warm damp cloth on the stoma and then breathe in. Remove crusts with tweezers, cotton tipped swabs, a clean cloth or washcloth. Be careful you do not put anything deep into the stoma. Your surgeon should remove any deep or hard to remove crusts.

Since you are no longer able to blow your nose, you must remove any mucous in your nose by hand with a wash cloth or tissue.

## **Get enough humidity:**

The air you breathe with a stoma does not go through your mouth and nose. The mouth and nose add water to the air before it goes into the lungs. Since you have a stoma, the air needs to be humidified some other way.

### **Humidity:**

- prevents crusting
- eases breathing
- reduces coughing

Use a humidifier or vaporizer in your bedroom at night. Stomas tend to dry and crust at night. Pans of water over a radiator or heat vent also provide moisture. Wearing a moistened stoma bib helps too.

You should also avoid drinking large amounts of alcohol as this will dry out your stoma.

## **Bathing and shampooing:**

When you bath or shampoo your hair, you need to make sure water and soap do not go in the stoma. This will make you cough.

### **Here are some helpful hints:**

- Use a chest-high shower spray and hose
- Buy a rubber stoma shield **or**
- Hold a damp-dry cloth over the stoma **or**
- Cup your hand over the stoma **or**
- Keep the stoma well above the water level in the bath tub
- Use a shower curtain to keep the steam in the tub
- Shampoo your hair while bending over or use a sink spray
- Have someone else help you wash your hair while you protect your stoma.