Day-to-day management of Tracheostomies & Laryngectomies

Speech after total laryngectomy

Surgical removal of the vocal cords results in an inability to phonate. This can be a source of immense frustration for patients. There are a variety of options available to total laryngectomesees which will be considered in turn.

Electrolarynx
These devices vibrate the external skin of the neck. They are used in combination with altering the shape of the mouth to create artificial speech. A degree of training is usually required.

Oesophageal speech
This type of speech involves swallowing air into the gullet via the mouth/nose and then ‘burping’ it back into the pharynx. This can be coupled with mouth shaping to generate speech. Some patients are very good at this, but again, this technique requires practice.

Tracheo-Oesophageal Punctures
These devices are often known as TEP (from the US spelling of ‘esophagus’). They can be created at the time of primary surgery, or later. A puncture is made into the posterior portion of the trachea into the oesophagus behind. Exhaled air can be forced through this connection by the patient by covering their stoma in expiration. Air passes through the pharynx as above and oesophageal speech is possible. A one-way valve is usually placed into the puncture site to reduce the risk of contamination of the airways with GI contents. Some stoma covers incorporate an additional valve to direct air through the TEP valve without manual occlusion of the stoma, which makes hands-free speech possible. TEP valves should not be removed in an emergency as they should not occlude the airway and removing them will not improve acute respiratory problems.

Image: TEP valve visible through the laryngectomy stoma, between the posterior wall of the trachea and the oesophagus behind.
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Patient Information sheets

There are a selection of information sheets for patients, carers and staff developed by the National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs in the UK. Their resources can be found at [www.laryngectomy.org.uk](http://www.laryngectomy.org.uk)