

Head and Neck Cancer Speech and Language Therapy

Laryngectomy Surgical Voice Restoration: Voicing exercises

General Guidelines

- **Try to keep as relaxed as possible** during these exercises and not push yourself too hard. If you use too much effort, your shoulders will rise, and the muscles which you need to be loose to vibrate and produce 'voice' will tighten.
- **Breathe slowly and deeply** during the exercise, and stop the exercise at any point if you feel light-headed or uncomfortable.
- **Keep exercise sessions short initially.** The muscles will tire quickly and exercising for longer will not be rewarding. No more than five minutes at a time should be attempted for the first few days, but sessions should be repeated throughout the day. The rule is '**little and often**'.
- Use a mirror to make sure the valve is clean and opening before you start

Before you begin:

Sit in a comfortable position with shoulders relaxed and practice placing your finger and thumb directly over your stoma (the hole through which you are breathing). If you are wearing a base plate and filter, press the filter inwards.



Warm up:

Try blocking your **outward breath** completely. To do this:

- take a deep breath in
- hold
- place your finger or thumb over stoma or filter and try to breathe out with your mouth open

If you can hear air 'whistling' around your finger or thumb then the seal is not complete.

If this is so, move your finger/thumb slightly and lean your body forwards. After approximately two seconds, remove your finger/thumb and breathe normally for a while.

So:

- **breathe in**
- **hold**
- **cover stoma**
- **breathe out with mouth open**
- **hear voice**
- **take your finger off stoma**

Do not be discouraged if the first few attempts produce no sound. The muscle used to produce your new voice is being expected to perform a completely different job now to normal. This means it can be quite resistant to begin with.

If you feel a build up of wind in your chest or stomach:

- stop exercising
- have a sip of water
- yawn twice
- wait for air to return
- repeat the drink and yawn if necessary

Exercise 1:

Once you have achieved some sort of sound, repeat the process above, but this time say 'ah' as you breathe out. Then try other long sounds, for example 'ee', 'oo', 'ow', and 'uh'. Hold the sound on for a few seconds.

Exercise 2:

Now try using your valve voice for longer and try saying 'ah, ee, oo, ah, ee, oo,' in one breath. Experiment with the order and length of the sounds.

Exercise 3:

Now practice words beginning with the sounds above. Do not worry if the word doesn't come out immediately. Wait for the first sound and then continue.

Try: arm, at, um, eat, oat, oak, and yes, no

Exercise 4:

Try counting aloud, very slowly to begin with, remember to slow down in the word, for example wun, twooo, th/r/ee, ff/our, five, six, and so on.

The muscle is probably still moving slower than is required for speech and if you try to speak at normal speed, parts of the words may not come out.

Exercise 5:

Try reciting days of the week, months of the year, poems, and nursery rhymes.

Exercise 6:

Try reading aloud. Start with one or two sentences and progress to a page at a time.

Exercise 7:

Try using your valve in conversations with friends and family. You may only want to try 'yes' or 'no' or a short sentence to begin with, but gradually increase the length of time you speak.

By this stage, the speed and quality of your valve voice should be improving daily and should be perfectly adequate for general conversation.

Use your valve as much as you can, with as many different people as possible.

Further Exercises

To improve your new voice, you might like to try the following:

- Experiment with the pitch of your voice. Practice 'gliding' your voice from a very high note to a lower note. Imagine you are sitting at the top of a slide (high note) and smoothly come down to the bottom of the slide (low note). Now try gliding from a low note to a higher note.
- Experiment with the volume of your voice. See if you can produce a quiet 'ah' by slowing down the speed the air you breathe out and then produce a very loud 'ah' by pushing air out faster. Next, try starting with a very quiet 'ah' and gradually getting louder. Now try starting with a very loud 'ah' and gradually quieten to a whisper.
- Do not forget the importance of clear articulation. Good valve voices are more than just a valve opening to let air through. Especially remember those sounds which have no voice, for example: s, sh, p, t, k, ch.

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