Patient Information

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

Head and Neck Cancer Team

Speech and Language Therapy

Laryngectomy surgical voice restoration - voicing exercises

General guidelines

- Try to stay as relaxed as possible during these exercises and avoid pushing yourself too hard. If you use too much effort, your shoulders may rise and the muscles that need to stay loose for voicing can tighten.
- Breathe slowly and deeply and stop the exercise at any point if you feel light-headed or uncomfortable.
- Keep exercise sessions short at first. The muscles may tire quickly, so longer sessions can be difficult. For the first few days, practice for no more than 5 minutes at a time but repeat sessions throughout the day. The rule is ‘little and often.”
- Use a mirror and make sure your valve is clean and opening before you start

Before you begin

- Sit in a comfortable position with your shoulders relaxed.
- Practice placing your finger and thumb directly over your stoma (the hole you breathe through).
- If you are wearing a base plate and filter, gently press the filter inwards.
- Use your non-dominant hand for voicing. For example, if you are right- handed, use your left hand to voice.

Warm up

Try blocking your breath completely. Take a deep breath in and hold it. Place your finger and thumb over your stoma (or HME). Try to breathe out with your mouth open.

If you hear air 'whistling' around your finger/thumb, the seal is not complete. Move your finger/thumb slightly and lean forward. After about 2 seconds, remove your finger/thumb and breathe normally for a while.

Summary: Breathe in – hold – cover stoma – breathe out with mouth open – hear voice – take finger off stoma.

- Do not worry if the first few attempts produce no sound. The muscles needed to produce your new voice are learning a completely different job and may be stiff at first.
- If you feel a build-up of air in your chest or stomach, stop, take a sip of water, and yawn twice. Wait for the air to settle, then repeat the drink and yawn if needed.

Exercise 1

Once you can make a sound, repeat the warm-up process, but this time say 'ah' as you breathe out. Then try other long sounds, such as 'ee,' 'oo,' 'ow,' 'uh,' etc. Hold each sound for a few seconds.

Exercise 2

Try using your valve voice for longer sounds. Say a sequence like 'ah, ee, oo, ah, ee, oo,' in one breath. Experiment with the order and length of the sounds

Exercise 3:

Practice saying words that start with these sounds. Do not worry if the word doesn't come out straight away, wait for the first sound, then continue.

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

Exercise 4

Try counting aloud slowly at first. Remember to stretch out the words, for example: wun, twooo, th/r/ee, ff/oour, five, six, and so on.

Note: These muscles may still be slower than needed for normal speech. If you try to speak at normal speed, some parts of the words may not come out clearly.

Exercise 5

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

Exercise 6

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

Exercise 7

Try using your valve in conversations with friends and family. You may want to start with just ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ or short sentences, and slowly increase the length of what you say.

By this stage, the speed and quality of your valve voice should improve daily and be adequate for general conversation. Use your valve as much as possible and practice with different people whenever you can.

More exercises

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

- Experiment with the volume of your voice.
- Try a quiet ‘ah’ by breathing out slowly.
- Try a loud ‘ah’ by pushing air out faster.
- Next, try starting quietly and slowly getting louder.

- Then try starting loudly and slowly quietening to a whisper.
- Remember the importance of clear articulation. A good valve voice is more than just air passing through the valve. Pay special attention to sounds with no voice, such as s, sh, p, t, k, ch.

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