University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

Patient Information

Head and Neck Cancer Speech and Language Therapy

Maintenance of your valve

You need to check your valve regularly to make sure it is not leaking. Check it daily at first. When you feel confident, you should still check it at least once a week.

Food debris can stick to the back of your valve and stop the flap from closing properly. This can cause leakage or coughing while you are eating or drinking. Sometimes the valve may leak without causing a cough, so it is important to check it regularly.

How to check your valve

1. Sit in front of a mirror with a good light on your stoma so you can see your valve clearly.
2. Take a sip of coloured drink (for example coffee, milk or squash) while watching looking at your valve.
3. If any liquid leaks through your valve, clean it thoroughly and try again.
4. If the liquid continues to leak, or if liquid leaks around the outside, contact the SLT team.
5. While eating and drinking, use thickening powder **or** your safety plug if the valve leaks. See the “Leaking Valves for Laryngectomy Patients” information sheet.
6. SLT will arrange a suitable time for your valve change.
7. You only need to wear the plug when eating or drinking. While the plug is in place, you will not be able to talk.
8. Use thickening powder in all drinks, including tea, coffee and alcoholic.

Do	Don't
Make sure the valve is not dislodged during cleaning	Leave the house without your catheter, plug and brush
Contact the Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) team if your valve leaks	Put anything other than the brush into the valve
Replace the cleaning brush regularly	Use anything other than soap and water to clean your brush.
Use thickening powder or your plug if your valve is leaking while eating or drinking (follow your "Leaking Valves" flowchart	

Common issues and solutions

Issue	Solution
Coughing when eating or drinking	Check your valve for a leak as above.
Your valve becomes dislodged (comes out)	Immediately place your catheter into the hole. See your "how to insert a Foley catheter" sheet. Contact SLT. If you **cannot** insert a catheter or the valve falls into your airway, go to A&E or call 999.
Skin around valve becomes raised, thickened or bleeds	Contact SLT
Voice deteriorates or is harder than usual	Clean your valve. If voice does not improve, contact SLT

Your valve appears too long or too tight	Contact SLT
Any other unusual problems with your valve	Contact SLT

Maintenance of your valve

If you have any problems with your valve, please call to make an appointment. If you are not sure whether you need an appointment, or just want advice, please contact us or ask someone to contact us for you.

Valve problems can get worse quickly, so do not ignore any issues.

The Speech and Language Therapy team is available Monday to Friday, 8 am to 4 pm.

Please do not attend the clinic without an appointment or calling first, as we may not be able to see you. You can also text our landline, and we will call you back as soon as possible.

- Phone: 024 769 66449

Once an appointment is made, please come to Clinic 10, Outpatients, UHCW.

For emergencies or breathing problems, go to your nearest A&E or call 999 if needed.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6449 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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