



Voice after Laryngectomy and Tracheoesophageal Puncture

Introduction

One of the most difficult aspects for patients undergoing total laryngectomy can be the loss of the normal means of voice creation. While the voice box will be removed during a laryngectomy, there are still several great ways patients can verbally communicate after surgery. These include using an electrolarynx, learning to create esophageal speech, and having a tracheoesophageal prosthesis (TEP) placed. Each of these have pros and cons which can be further explained by your surgeon; your surgeon may also want you to meet with a speech language pathologist (SLP) to learn more about these options.

What is a tracheoesophageal prosthesis?

A tracheoesophageal prosthesis is a one-way valve surgically placed into the back wall of the laryngectomy stoma. This creates a connection between the trachea and the esophagus which allows air from the lungs to be directed up into the mouth and nose to help create voice. The prosthesis stays in place 24 hours a day to help minimize the potential for food, liquid, or saliva to leak into the windpipe.

How is a TEP placed?

A TEP can be placed with several different techniques. They are sometimes placed at the time of the laryngectomy but can also be done with a separate procedure or surgery after you've healed from the laryngectomy. Once in place, the TEP will need to be replaced – usually every 3-6 months.

How do I create a voice with a TEP?

To talk with a TEP in place, take a breath and then occlude your laryngectomy stoma. When you start to talk, you'll push the air from your lungs through the TEP and into the esophagus. The esophageal tissue above the prosthesis vibrates as the air passes, creating a voice. This often takes a little practice but usually results in a very fluent sounding voice.

Is a TEP right for you?

A TEP is an excellent option for many laryngectomy patients but it isn't the right choice for everyone. Talk to your surgeon and SLP to get more information about how you can best create a voice after your laryngectomy.