



Your Care After Head or Neck Surgery

For patients receiving treatment for head and neck cancer

This section of the Guide to Your Head and Neck Cancer Treatment explains how to schedule your first clinic visit after surgery, and what happens at that visit. It also covers issues related to nutrition and medical alert jewelry.

Scheduling Your First Clinic Visit After Your Hospital Stay

- The nurse practitioner will help you and your family set up your first clinic visit before you leave the hospital.
- You will return to the Otolaryngology clinic 1 week from the day you leave the hospital. Other appointments after your first visit will be set up when you are in the clinic.
- The schedule for your follow-up clinic visits will be based on your needs and what was done in your surgery.
- The nurse practitioner will be your contact person in the Otolaryngology clinic for follow-up after surgery.

Your First Clinic Visit After Surgery

Checking the Surgery Site and Suture Removal

You will return to the Otolaryngology clinic 1 week from the day that you leave the hospital. You will see the nurse practitioner or one of the otolaryngology residents at this visit. At that time, we will check your surgery incision. We may or may not remove the surgery staples at your neck incision at this first visit:

- **If you have *not* had radiation therapy before surgery**, the sutures around the edge of your laryngeal stoma will be removed at this clinic visit.
- **If you have had radiation therapy in the past**, your laryngeal stoma sutures will be removed about 2 weeks from the day you leave the hospital. This is because the skin at the neck heals more slowly if you have had radiation therapy in the past.

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- **If you have a TEP puncture with a red rubber catheter**, your neck incision staples will be removed at this visit and the red rubber catheter and your laryngeal stoma sutures will remain in place. This is because you have likely already had radiation therapy.

You will return to the clinic again about 2 weeks from the day you leave the hospital. At that time, your laryngeal stoma sutures will be removed. The red rubber catheter will also be removed and a speech pathologist will place your TEP prosthesis.

Checking Your Progress and the Follow-up Treatment Plan

While you are at the clinic, we will also:

- Review your diet.
- Ask how you are progressing at home since discharge.
- Review your pathology report.
- Review your post-surgery treatment plan. This plan would include radiation therapy and/or chemotherapy, if needed.

Feeding Tube Follow-up and Transition to an Oral Diet

The timing of your transition to an oral diet will vary:

- **If you have already had your nasal feeding tube removed by the time you leave the hospital**, you will start on a clear liquid diet and advance to a soft food diet when you are ready. You will have a follow-up visit with the dietitian when you come for a clinic visit, if needed.
- **If your nasal feeding tube stayed in place when you left the hospital**, we will evaluate whether you are ready to start on an oral diet when you come to the clinic for your visit. If you are ready to start eating by mouth, your nasal feeding tube will be removed during your clinic visit. You will start on a liquid diet and advance to a soft diet.
- **If you have a red rubber catheter in place at your TEP site**, you may have started on a diet by mouth as well as taking feeding through your red rubber catheter before you left the hospital. Once the red rubber catheter is removed, you will be on an oral diet.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Otolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery Center: 206-598-4022

Medical Alert Jewelry

We recommend that you get medical identification or alert jewelry to wear at all times after your surgery. Some people like to wear a bracelet and others prefer a necklace.

Health care staff and emergency care providers need to know that you breathe through a laryngeal stoma. Also, if you ever need assistance and cannot communicate, a medical alert bracelet or necklace would let anyone know that you breathe through a stoma.

Medical alert jewelry is available from many sources. There is an order form and information about ordering online in the last section of this guide.

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