

Swallowing and voice changes after anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF) surgery

Information for patients

This leaflet provides information on what ACDF surgery is, possible swallowing and voice changes to expect after surgery, how speech and language therapy can help and practical advice to support your recovery. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the team caring for you.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your name and date of birth and check your ID band. If you do not have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address. If we do not ask these questions, then please ask us to check. Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

What is anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF) surgery?

ACDF surgery is a procedure to remove a damaged disc between the vertebrae in the neck. The aim of the surgery is to reduce pressure on the nerves or spinal cord.

The surgery is carried out through the front of the neck. To reach the disc, the surgeon carefully moves the muscles, the windpipe (trachea) and the food pipe (oesophagus) to one side.

What to expect after surgery

After ACDF surgery, it is quite common to notice temporary changes to your swallowing or voice.

This may happen due to:

- stretching of the nerves that supply the vocal cords
- swelling or bruising in the throat after surgery

Most people improve within a few days and fully recover. However, occasionally difficulties can last several weeks or longer and those patients may benefit from support from a speech and language therapist (SLT).

How can an SLT support me?

If you notice problems with your swallow or voice, an SLT will assess you.

They will:

- check that you can swallow safely
- give advice or exercises to support your voice
- make recommendations about food and drink if needed

What changes can occur to my voice?

You may notice:

- hoarse, rough, breathy, weak or strained voice
- dry or achy throat
- a 'lump in the throat' sensation (called globus)
- rarely, loss of voice (aphonia)

How to take care of your voice

- Rest your voice – talk less and take breaks.
- While in hospital, limit voice use as much as possible.
- Do not whisper or shout, as this strains your voice.
- Use non-verbal communication (writing, texting, gestures).
- Avoid lifting heavy objects – ask for help where possible.
- Try not to strain when going to the toilet.
- Avoid harsh throat clearing or coughing
- Keep well hydrated once it is safe to eat and drink.
- Avoid caffeine (such as tea and coffee) unless advised otherwise, as it can dry the throat.

What changes can occur to my swallow?

You may notice:

- food or drink feeling stuck
- coughing or choking when eating or drinking
- food, drink or saliva going down the 'wrong way'
- pain when swallowing
- needing sips of fluid to clear food
- feeling tired during meals
- difficulty coordinating breathing and swallowing

If you have swallowing concerns, you must be assessed by an SLT.

Early swallow assessment is very important.

This helps reduce the risk of food or drink going down 'the wrong way', which is called aspiration.

General advice for safer swallowing

- Reduce distractions during meals.
- Sit upright when eating, drinking or taking medication.
- Eat and drink slowly.
- When drinking, take small sips and do not use straws unless advised.
- Take small mouthfuls.
- Chew food well.
- Do not talk while eating.

If swallowing problems are more severe

Some people may need:

- changes to food texture
- thickened drinks
- temporary feeding through a tube from the nose to the stomach (called a nasogastric or NG tube)

This may mean being nil by mouth (NBM) for a longer period. Your SLT will advise if this is necessary.

MyChart

Our MyChart app and website lets you securely access parts of your health record with us, giving you more control over your care. To sign up or for help, call us on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.mychart@nhs.net. Visit www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart to find out more.

Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information visit www.kch.nhs.uk.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our nursing students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618**

Email: **kings.pals@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.access@nhs.net