



PATIENT INFORMATION

Glossectomy

What is a Glossectomy?

This is an operation to remove a cancer in your tongue. The level of operation will depend on how much cancer has been found:

- Partial Glossectomy- removal of less than half of your tongue
- Total Glossectomy- removal of all of your tongue

How is tongue cancer diagnosed?

Your doctor will examine your mouth using a mirror and light and ask you about your medical history, signs and symptoms and ask for an x-ray to be taken of your jaws. Your doctor may then order a special x-ray called a CT scan, which uses a computer to make a picture of the inside of your head and neck. Another special scan, called an MRI scan, may also be done.

If tissue that is not normal is found, your doctor will need to cut out a small piece of tissue and look at it under a microscope, this is called a biopsy. Sometimes the biopsy can be done in the Outpatients Department and sometimes it is necessary to do this under a general anaesthetic which may require an overnight stay in hospital.

What does surgery mean?

The surgery you will have depends on the size of the cancer and whether it has spread. You will usually be admitted to the ward on the day of your operation. The operation involves removing the area of cancer plus a margin of healthy tongue around the area to make sure all of the cancer has been removed. It may be necessary to replace this tissue with a piece of skin from elsewhere on your body; this is called a 'free flap'. Your doctor will explain this to you in more detail (*Ask for separate leaflet about free flaps*).

If cancer has spread into the lymph nodes in the neck, some or all of the lymph nodes may be removed; this is called a neck dissection. The average length of stay will be 2-14 days depending on the extent of your surgery. (*Ask for separate leaflet about neck dissection*).

Care is provided throughout by a large team of doctors, nurses, dietitians, physiotherapists and speech and swallowing therapists, all offering support and information for you and your family.

What problems can occur?

Eating and drinking If you need to have surgery inside your mouth you may not be allowed to eat or drink for the first 10 days. If this is the case, feeding will be continued by a naso-gastric tube through your nostril into your stomach. This special feed will be carefully monitored by the dietitian.

Infection Mouthwashes will be given to keep your mouth clean and fresh. Any infection can usually be easily treated with antibiotics.

Pain If you suffer any pain it is important that you tell the doctors and nurses looking after you. Painkillers will be available as you need them.

Speech and swallowing Sometimes speech and swallowing can be difficult in the period following surgery. The speech and swallowing therapist will visit you on the ward, or following discharge, to help you with this if necessary.

How quickly will I recover?

Recovery depends very much on the level of surgery you have undergone as well as your own individual healing. Resuming daily activities, including work, as soon as you are able can help the healing process.

Your feelings

You are likely to experience a number of different emotions, from shock and disbelief to fear and anger. These feelings are quite natural and it is important for you to be able to express these feelings if you wish.

Everyone has their own ways of coping with difficult situations. Some people find it helpful to talk to family and friends, while others prefer to seek help from professionals and some will prefer to keep their feelings to themselves. There is no right or wrong way to cope, but help is there if you need it.

Talk to your specialist nurse for further information about the help available. Remember, there are other patients who have gone through the same situation. Your specialist nurse can put you in touch with someone who knows what it is like.

For more information

If you have any questions about the procedure or about the information in this leaflet, please contact:

Head and Neck Clinical Specialist Nurse ☎ Tel (01803) 655044
Cancer backup ☎ Tel 0808 800 1234 www.cancerbackup.org.uk