

Department of  
**Otorhinolaryngology (ENT)**

Patient Guidebook for Enhanced Recovery After  
Surgery (ERAS) - Head and Neck Surgery



# This Book Belongs To:

PATIENT STICKER



## IMPORTANT

Please bring this booklet with you  
when you visit the following:



- Clinic 1B
  - PACE Clinic & Anaesthesia  
Counselling
  - Pharmacy
  - Dietitian
  - Speech therapist
  - Day Surgery Centre
  - Day of Your Surgery
- Date: (\_\_\_\_\_)

# Content Page

## Before Surgery

<b>1</b>	Understanding Head & Neck Surgery .....	4
	• Main Operation	4
	• Reconstruction	5
	• How Long Will It Take?	6
<b>2</b>	Preparations for Surgery.....	7
	• Mental Preparation	7
	• Stop Smoking and Drinking Alcohol	8
	• Eat Healthy and Right	9
	• Staying Active	11
<b>3</b>	What Must I Do the Day Before Surgery? .....	12
	• Reporting Time and Location	12
	• Fasting	12

## Day of Surgery

<b>4</b>	What Must I Do on the Day of Surgery? .....	13
	• Carbohydrate Preloading	13
	• Preparation for General Anaesthesia	13

# Content Page

## After Surgery

<b>5</b>	What can I Expect After My Surgery?.....	14
	• Immediately After the Operation	14
	• Days 1 – 7	15
	• Days 8 – 14	16
<b>6</b>	What Can I Do to Improve My Recovery?.....	17
	• Stay Positive	17
	• Reducing Pain and Nausea	18
	• Participate Actively in Physiotherapy	19
	• Learn to Care for Yourself	19

## Discharge From Hospital

<b>7</b>	What Can I Expect After I Discharge?.....	20
	• Pain and Discomfort	20
	• Feeding and Eating	20
	• My Next Follow-up	21
	• Contact Information	21

# Understanding Head & Neck Surgery

## Main Operation

The main purpose of the surgery is to remove all visible tumours.

Your surgery will involve the safe removal of a part of/your whole:

- Tongue/Jaw
- Throat (Pharynx)
- Voice box (Larynx)
- Major salivary gland
- Lymph glands of the neck
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

Scars to expect:



# Understanding Head & Neck Surgery

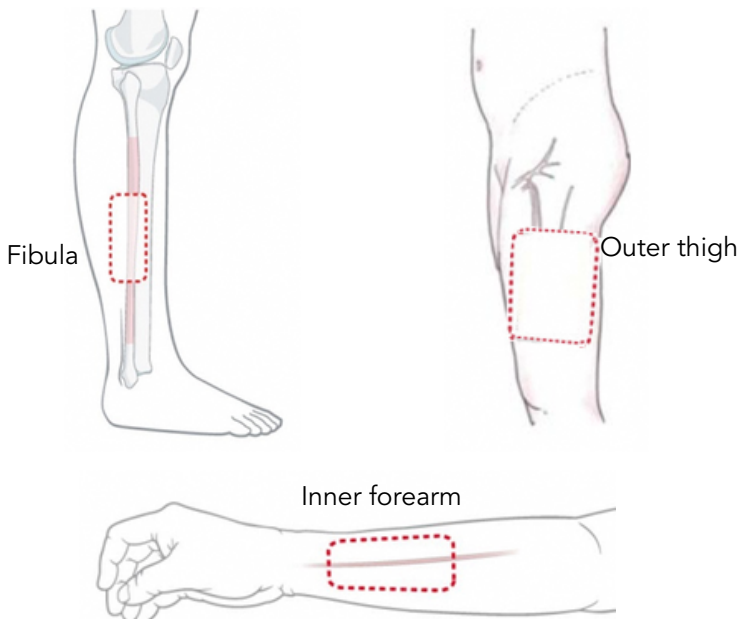
## Reconstruction

After removing tumours, certain organs/structures in the body that play a role in speaking and swallowing may be affected.

To restore the function of these organs, the plastic surgery team will reconstruct the affected parts using tissue from another part of your body (free flap).

Your plastic surgery team will advise you on the area (donor site) from which they will obtain normal tissue for reconstruction.

Your free flap will be obtained from:



# Understanding Head & Neck Surgery

## How long will it take?

The whole operation will take 12-18 hours from preparing you for anaesthesia to waking you up post-surgery.

Depending on the size and location of the tumour, removal and reconstruction will take an average of four to eight hours each.

If you have family members who wish to visit you after the operation, they can do so the following morning in the ward/ICU.

# Preparations for Surgery

## Prepare Yourself Mentally

The journey to full recovery is long. We encourage seeking emotional and social support from friends and family members in the coming weeks to months.

You should remain positive and know that you will feel better as you progress through this journey.

We will accompany you every step of the way.



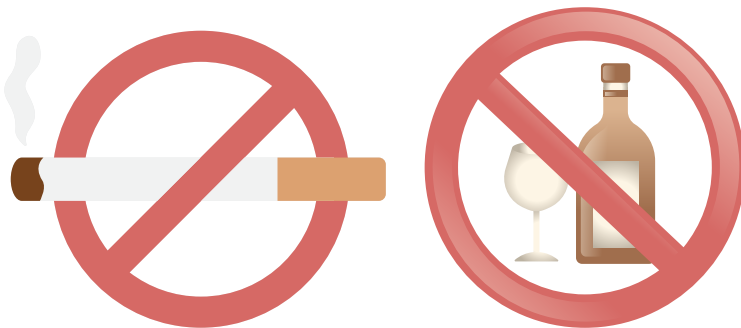


# Preparations for Surgery

## Stop Smoking and Drinking Alcohol

Smoking and alcohol consumption can cause complications after surgery (e.g. delayed wound healing and wound infections).

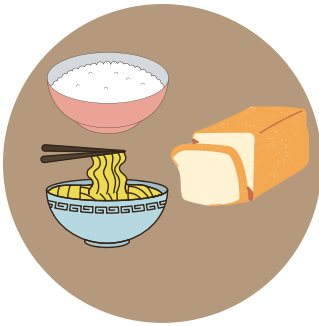
If you require help to stop smoking (e.g. with nicotine gums or patches), do not hesitate to approach us.



# Preparations for Surgery

## Eat Well and Eat Right

Your body needs adequate nutrients and energy to prepare for and recover from surgery. You must continue to eat well.



Foods that give you energy, such as rice, noodles, porridge, breads and healthy oils.



Foods high in protein, such as pork, chicken, fish, beef, tofu, eggs, milk and soy milk.

# Preparations for Surgery

## Eat Well and Eat Right

If you lack the proper amount of nutrients, a dietitian will suggest dietary changes and provide supplements if needed. They help to prevent weight loss, and maintain muscle mass and immunity.



- Your doctor may prescribe you nutrition drinks (e.g. Oral Impact) to take before surgery.



Go to **Page 22:**  
How to Use Oral  
Impact

If you have swallowing issues before your surgery, please inform your doctor to refer you to a speech therapist to assess and advise you.

# Preparations for Surgery

## Stay Active



Daily exercise is important to keep your body strong and ready for surgery.

- If you are already exercising, continue to do so.
- If you are not, start adding exercises into your daily routine slowly

- Simple exercises such as brisk walking, jogging or swimming for a minimum of 30 minutes a day is strongly recommended.
- Staying active helps you return to normal activities faster after surgery.



# What Must I Do the Day Before Surgery?



You will receive a call from Day Surgery Centre one day before the surgery. Please take note of your reporting time and location for tomorrow:

Reporting Time: \_\_\_\_\_

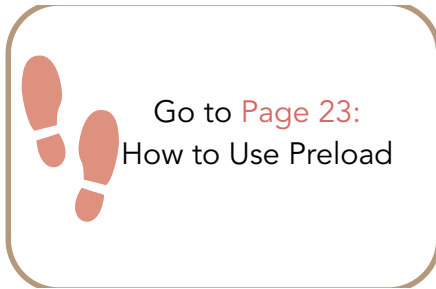
Reporting Location: \_\_\_\_\_



You must remember to start fasting at 12 midnight on the night before the surgery. Otherwise, your surgery may be postponed.

# What Must I Do on the Day of Surgery?

- You will need to take the prescribed dose of carbohydrate drinks at home at least 2 hours before the surgery (e.g. 4am) before coming to the hospital.



- When you arrive at the hospital, you will meet the team of doctors and nurses that will be taking care of you.
- The anaesthetists will examine you and set IV lines to administer fluids and medications while you are under general anaesthesia.
- You will be brought to the operating room and put under general anaesthesia. After which, the operation will commence.

# What Can I Expect After My Surgery?

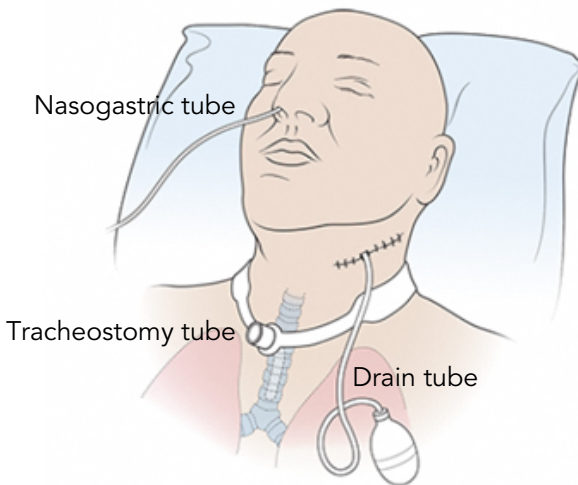
## Immediately After the Operation

You will be in the high dependency ward or intensive care unit for your doctors and nurses to monitor you closely.

You may have several tubes and drains coming out of your body that are important for your recovery:

- Tracheostomy tube (breathing)
- Nasogastric tube/Gastrostomy tube (feeding)
- Other tubes (drains, IV lines, urinary catheter)

As you may not be able to speak immediately after the operation, you can communicate with us by writing.



# What Can I Expect After My Surgery?

## Week 1 (Days 1 to 7)



During the first few days, nurses will check on you every hour to:

- Ensure that your wound is healing well
- Remove mucus from your mouth and tracheostomy tubes
- Monitor your blood and replace your electrolytes if necessary



Your doctors will check in on you every morning, and in the evening if necessary. Take the time to write down any questions you have so that we can address your concerns.



The first few days of recovery will be the most uncomfortable but please be assured that your healthcare team will take good care of you. You will gradually feel better.



Your dietitian will start you on nutrition, delivered through your feeding tube. They will gradually increase the number of feeds if you respond well.



After three or four days, some of your tubes may be removed, and you will be transferred to the general ward.



# What Can I Expect After My Surgery?

## Week 2 (Days 8 to 14)



In the first week, you may undergo gentle physiotherapy, which will increase in intensity in the second week.



Your dietitian will ensure that you receive sufficient nutrients through your feeding tube (every three to four hours) to build up your strength, and support your wound healing and recovery.



You should experience less swelling and pain around your neck, thus requiring less painkillers.



Stitches and staples will be removed after 10-14 days once your wound has healed.



After 14 days, you can look forward towards full recovery and discharge. It is important to let us know who will be taking care of you so that we can teach them how to care for you.

# What Can I Do to Improve My Recovery?

## Stay Positive



Recovery will be slow but certain.



Feelings of frustration and helplessness are common when you are unable to perform most of your daily activities (e.g. talking and eating).



We encourage you to stay motivated and positive and continue to do things that you enjoy (e.g. listening to music).

# What Can I Do to Improve My Recovery?

## Reducing Pain and Nausea



You will be given painkillers regularly to help with post-operative pain. If the pain is affecting your daily life, please inform your nurses early so that we can provide you with adequate amounts of painkillers through your recovery.

# What Can I Do to Improve My Recovery?

## Participate Actively in Physiotherapy

The physiotherapists will see you after your surgery.



You should actively participate in physiotherapy as it is proven to reduce post operation complications such as chest infection, bed sores and physical deconditioning.

Once you are strong enough to move about independently, you should remain out of your bed for a few hours a day.

## Learn to Care for Yourself



Your nurses will teach you (and your caregiver) how to care for your feeding and breathing tubes.

Be proactive and learn as much from them as you can, so that you will be confident in caring for yourself at home after discharge.

# Discharge From Hospital

## Pain and Discomfort



It is normal to experience mild pain or discomfort especially around the wounds. Please take your pain medications regularly or as necessary if the pain improves.

## Feeding and Eating

You will likely be required to continue tube feeding upon discharge. Follow your feeding schedule to get the nutrients required for your recovery.

You may feel the urge to eat/drink but this might be unsafe to do so.

Our speech therapist will assess and advise on what is appropriate and safe for you.

# Discharge from Hospital

## Follow-up Appointments



Please take note of all your appointments upon discharge and attend them as scheduled.

When we have the full results from the laboratory, your doctors will discuss your case at the multidisciplinary tumour board. Subsequently, they will recommend the next step of treatment (e.g. radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy).

## Contact Information

If you face any problems or have urgent questions before your next appointment, you may wish to contact:



Head and Neck Cancer Coordinator  
*Ms Agnes Chew*



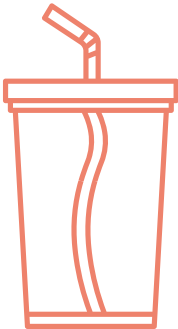
6357 3040/ 6889 4180  
8.30 am - 5.00 pm (Mon - Fri)

# Powdered Nutritional Supplement

## How to Use Oral Impact



To be taken over 5-7 days prior to your surgery.



- Empty one sachet of Oral Impact into 250ml (one large cup) of warm water. Mix well. Consume Immediately.
- Using a shaker can help dissolve your powder.

# Formulated Carbohydrate Drink

## How to Use Vitaflo Preload



- You should have been prescribed a total of **one** sachet of Preload to be taken on the day of surgery.
- Take Preload at least **two** hours before your surgery.



- Empty one sachet of Preload into 400ml of water. Stir continuously. Consume Immediately.
- Use a measuring jug to get the right amount of water.



**Clinic 1B**  
TTSH Medical Centre, Level 1  
**Contact:**  
6357 7000 (Central Hotline)



Scan the QR Code with your smart  
phone to access the information online  
or visit  
<https://for.sg/ttsh-health-library>

Was this information helpful?  
Please feel free to email us if you  
have any feedback regarding what  
you have just read at  
[patienteducation@ttsh.com.sg](mailto:patienteducation@ttsh.com.sg)



© Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore 2024. All rights reserved. All information correct as of Feb 2024. No part of this document may be reproduced, copied, reverse compiled, adapted, distributed, commercially exploited, displayed or stored in a database, retrieval system or transmitted in any form without prior permission of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. All information and material found in this document are for purposes of information only and are not meant to substitute any advice provided by your own physician or other medical professionals.