

Going home with facial disfigurement after head and neck surgery

Cancer Services

Information for patients going home after head and neck cancer surgery



Introduction

This leaflet has been designed to provide you with information and support that may help you as you prepare to go home from hospital after your surgery for head and neck cancer. Leaving hospital can often be a difficult time especially if you are worried about changes to your appearance and what others might think.

Cancer treatment can result in changes to how you look, feel and even function. For many head and neck cancer patients whose faces change significantly during treatment, adjusting to their new appearance can be traumatic.

Unlike other types of cancer, the scars from head and neck cancer

Your feelings

often cannot be covered or hidden and are therefore visible to everyone. You may feel self-conscious and less confident than you used to, as you come to terms with your new face. However, you can still lead a happy and productive life if you learn to accept change, take advantage of the many different kinds of help available and find ways to adapt.

Being able to accept yourself is often the first step in learning how to live with a disfigurement. It's not an easy process, but with time and effort, it is possible to learn to accept the changes to your body that cancer and cancer treatment may cause.

You cannot control how other people react to you, but you can

Those around you

influence their reactions by trying to be being positive and confident even if you do not feel it. You can control your own reactions to others by learning coping strategies that can help you feel less bothered by negative reactions and move on from them more easily.

Some coping strategies

Here are some simple strategies to help you influence the reactions of others and become more confident with different situations:

- **Take control**– move away from a situation where you feel uncomfortable, try talking about something else to distract the other person. Consider something as simple as wearing a hat (which will also protect you from the sun) because people tend to look first at hats and not facial disfigurement
- **Speak first** - try to smile and don't give the other person time to decide how to react to your appearance. Don't wait for others to react, take the initiative and break the ice.
- **Humour** – use humour to lighten the situation where possible or to put a person at ease. Try to make other people smile and feel relaxed when meeting you.
- **Be positive and friendly** – show people you are in control by taking a “hello, I am here” approach. Carry a notepad and pen to help with communication if you have difficulty speaking clearly.
- **Questions** – only answer questions you feel comfortable to answer: be patient and tell yourself the reason someone is asking is that they are curious and don't understand what has happened to you. Don't feel like you have to put up with unwanted rude attention.

Finding information and support

Talking to other patients

You may wish to talk to another patient about their experience and how they cope. Your key worker (cancer nurse specialist) will be able to help find a patient for you to talk to. You can contact them on 0116 204 7829.

Head and Neck Cancer Support Group (Leicester)

Meets monthly. Contact the Head and Neck Cancer Key Worker for more details:

Telephone: 07960 500 043.

Coping with Cancer

Charity providing practical and emotional support to anyone affected by cancer.

Address: Helen Webb House

35 Westleigh Road, Leicester, LE3 0HH

Telephone: 0116 223 0055

Email: admin@c-w-c.org.uk

Website: www.c-w-c.org.uk

Macmillan Information and Support Centre

Provides a wide variety of information to patients, carers and relatives on all aspects of cancer and coping with a diagnosis of cancer.

Address: Osborne Building, Leicester Royal Infirmary
Leicester LE1 5WW

Telephone: 0116 258 6189

Email: cancerinfo@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Website: www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/cancerinfo

Other useful resources

Macmillan Cancer Support Helpline

This is a free line of support and information for people affected by cancer, who have questions about cancer, need support or just someone to talk to.

It is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

(interpretation service available).

Telephone: 0808 808 0000

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

The Swallows Head and Neck Cancer Support Group

National head and neck cancer support group.

Website: www.theswallows.org.uk

24/7 support line: 07504 725 059

Mouth Cancer Foundation

This charity raises awareness of cancer to the head and neck region.

Website: www.mouthcancerfoundation.org

Changing Faces

This charity provides support and information for patients with disfigurement to the face and their families.

Telephone: 0300 0120 275

Website: www.changingfaces.org.uk

With thanks to all patients, carers and healthcare professionals who have contributed to this booklet.

Health information is available at www.nhs.uk or call **111** for non-emergency medical advice



Leicester's Hospitals is a research active trust so you may find research is happening on your ward or in your clinic.

To find out more about the benefits of research and become involved yourself, speak to your clinician or nurse, call **0116 258 8351** or visit www.leicestersresearch.nhs.uk/patient-and-public-involvement

For maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone the number below or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

إذا كنت ترغب في الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો.

0116 250 2959

To give feedback on this leaflet contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

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