

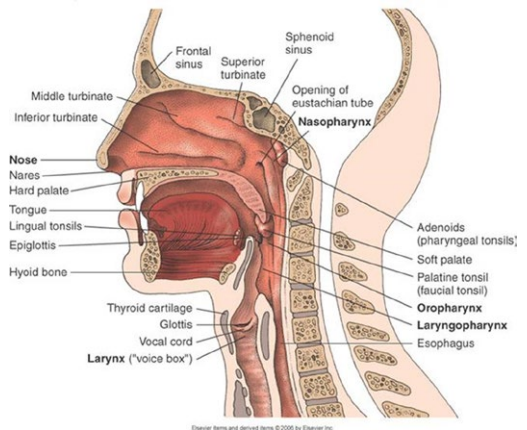
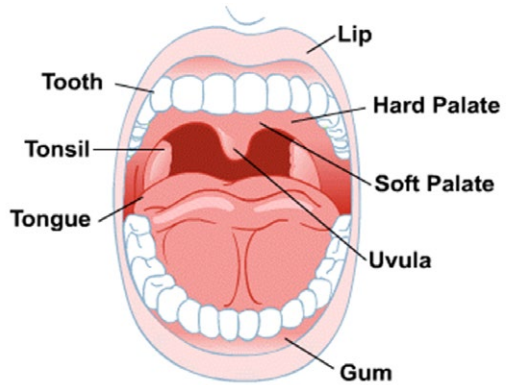
Speech Pathology
Royal North Shore and Ryde Hospitals

Speech and Swallowing after Surgery for Head and Neck Cancer

Speech Pathologists see patients who are having surgery for a head and neck cancer

- to educate patients about effects of surgery
- to assess speech and swallowing problems that exist before surgery
- to rehabilitate speech and swallowing after surgery

Surgery firstly aims to control the cancer. This means that certain structures need to be removed. Along with plastic surgeons, head and neck surgeons attempt to reconstruct the missing tissue, but this will always be 'second best' to the tissue that existed before the cancer occurred.



After surgery:

- You will have swelling at the surgical site for a time
- Flaps are often used to reconstruct surgical defects. Flaps feel numb and do not contain muscle
- You may have a temporary tracheostomy (a breathing tube in your neck), which may mean you have no voice or a poor voice at first
- You may be fed through a tube in your nose to allow the tissues in your mouth and throat to heal



In general, therapy after surgery aims at making your tongue, throat and palate as strong and mobile as possible.

- it is important that any exercises are gentle while your tissues heal
- exercises will focus on mobility and flexibility to increase the range of movement
- when you can swallow again, this will also help with mobility and strength

You may be surprised about how weak your tongue, lips and throat are. This will improve as you return to normal activity. You may need to start with a diet that has been modified (i.e. pureed food) to help you swallow.

Speech can also be distorted and the speech pathologist will help you speak as well as you can.

If you have any concerns or questions, please contact the Speech Pathology Department:

RNSH – 02 9463 1622

Ryde – 02 9858 7812