

My Head & Neck Cancer Surgery



You will have had your cancer surgery. I had mine during May 2011, discharged from hospital 12 days later followed by 20 doses of radiotherapy. You can see from my photograph how my head is now. My facial nerve was cut. I had to learn how to regain my balance having had one ear removed, how to speak to be understood, how to eat and drink without spilling fluid down the front of my shirt. For the first three years I could only drink using a special straw. I could not close my left eye and had a gold weight fitted to upper eyelid. Movement of my left arm has also been left restricted.

Leaving hospital, I thought, "What do I do now" suddenly feeling all alone to deal with my facial disfigurement and other changes to my head and my body.

Are you now wondering how best to manage your difficulties that might lie ahead?

May I give you some simple suggestions on how to cope from the very first time you walk down a street, based upon my own experience?

Most people you will meet as you leave hospital will be kind and sympathetic but do not be surprised by a minority who react differently to the way you now look. Whilst you might feel apprehensive, as I discovered, there are very simple ways you can deal with those awkward situations.

Like me, you will need to learn how to build your own ways to protect yourself against unwanted stares, rude comments and embarrassment amongst strangers and when meeting people for the first time. If you can learn how to take control by confronting negative reactions from other people, your anxiety will decrease as you become more and more confident to cope.

24/7

Patient and Carer
support line service:

**07504
725 059**

8 Simple Suggestions

to help you →

The Swallows

Head & Neck Cancer Support Group
Registered Charity Number: 1149794



Sounds simple but very effective.
Distract attention from your face by buying and wearing a hat, wide brimmed if you need protection from the sun. It works. People tend to comment on the hats I wear and not on my disfigured face.

Speak first. Try to smile.
Don't give the other person time to decide how to react to your appearance.

Try good humour.
My favourite is to point to my face and say with a smile "I didn't always look as good as this".

Out-stare rude people who stare. Make them blink to make them look away. It is natural for little children to stare out of curiosity who might ask for an explanation and then turn away satisfied to play happily. Some older children have not been taught by their parents that it is rude to stare and need to be helped not to do it. Some adults have never learned it is rude to stare.

Do not put up with people who ignore you as though you are not a live human being. For example, when out with a friend in a restaurant waiting to order, if you are ignored and your friend is spoken to find your own way of butting in. Sometimes I think people assume I am senile because of my appearance and need reminding by me. Adopt a, "Hello. I am here," approach.

If you have difficulty in speaking clearly, carry a notepad and pen to make yourself clearly understood.

When questioned for example, "Have you had a stroke" give only the information you feel comfortable to give. No need even to mention cancer if you don't want to. Be patient if you are given well meaning advice such as "My dog had cancer once but the vet cured it".

Finally, and worth repeating. Do not wait for other people to act upon their prejudices about facial disfigurement. Take the initiative, take control and be the first to break the ice.

As time goes by everything will become easier partly as you meet more and more people who see you as you are and not judge you by the way you look.

Contact George on 0116 287 4622

Volunteer at Coping with Cancer, Helen Webb House, 35 Westleigh Road, Leicester, LE3 0HH

**For more information about The Swallows visit
www.theswallows.org.uk or call 01253 428 940**



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