

What to Expect After Anterior Cervical Spine Surgery: Speaking and Eating

What to Expect After Surgery

You may have trouble swallowing (dysphagia) and speaking (dysphonia). These are common and may last for a few days or a few months.

In the Hospital

Throat swelling

Right after surgery, your throat may be sore and your voice may sound hoarse or like a whisper. You may feel like it is hard to swallow. These are all normal reactions to surgery.

- Your surgeon might prescribe medicines to help decrease swelling in your throat. The swelling should start to go away in 24 to 48 hours.
- A speech-language pathologist may meet with you to help manage these side effects.
- Tell your nurse or surgeon if you are unable to swallow your saliva.

Diet

- You may have mostly liquids because these might be easy to swallow right after surgery:
 - soup or broth
 - flavored gelatin
 - ice cream
 - juice
 - milk
 - soda.

- You may feel comfortable swallowing soft solid foods such as scrambled eggs, noodles, oatmeal, canned fruits and vegetables.
- Your health care team will decide the best foods and textures for you.
- You may find medicines are easier to take if you cut or crush your pills, or take them in a bite of yogurt or applesauce.
- A member of your health care team may want you to take a test to study your swallowing.

Voice

Your voice should gradually sound better, even if it does not sound “normal” for many weeks.

At Home

- For most people, swallow and voice troubles will go away on their own within a few weeks to months. However, some may have issues for up to 6 months after surgery.
- Tell your surgeon at your follow-up appointments if you continue to have significant changes in eating or speaking.
- If you are unable to swallow your saliva, you should see your surgeon right away. If you have trouble breathing, have someone take you to an Emergency Department, or call 911.

Talk with your surgeon if you have questions about your swallowing, speech or voice. He or she may also want you to talk with a speech-language pathologist.