



*Coping with  
mood changes after  
laryngectomy*

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*in conjunction with*

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## *Moods can be unpredictable*

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Coming to terms with having a laryngectomy is confusing and difficult – mood swings are inevitable and can be quite frightening.

*“I felt like I was on an emotional roller coaster – one day great, the next day down.”*

(BE)

After the initial numbness, fear and the shock of having to have the operation have worn off, there can be a feeling of euphoria and relief that you are still alive. However, don't be surprised if a few days later you feel a sense of depression. This is very common and a lot of people experience this feeling of loss and despondency, particularly after they have been home for a few days and the hustle and bustle of hospital is in the past. It is perhaps now that you realise how much things have changed.

*“I felt depressed when I came home, I couldn't eat, I couldn't speak; how was I going to manage?”*

(SJ)

*“Moods are very extreme at times – high and low – sometimes I have a lot of self pity, get quite tearful – or angry and bitter. These feelings get less as time goes by but they are still there.”*

(GD)

## *Your family's reaction to your mood*

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Families will also be affected by your mood swings and depression. Two relatives of laryngectomees report:

*“I've found the worst part of her illness and operation has been the depression. I can't do anything about the depression and feel as if I'm letting her down.”*

(SM)

*“I still feel so much guilt – because I hate the mess and get impatient, because I thought so much of myself and the children, because he's the one who's suffered and he just gets on with life and never complains.”*

(AK)

## *People cope differently*

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Everybody expresses emotions. Some people prefer to keep it to themselves and find it difficult to talk or cry. A wife of a laryngectomee describes how she felt unable to express what she was feeling:

*“I had a real fear I would break down and cry. I didn’t cry at all for the first three years, first because I felt that I wasn’t entitled to cry and after because I couldn’t.”*

(AK)

Other people describe how they felt crying was the beginning of a healing process. This lady felt it helped release her emotions and start to come to terms with the effects of surgery.

*“I cried for almost six weeks non-stop.”*

(BD)

## *Communication difficulties and mood*

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Everyone experiences some degree of communication difficulty at first and this inevitably makes feelings of anger, frustration and depression even worse.

*“I was literally jumping up and down in anger when my family couldn’t understand me. I then got depressed and did not want to mix socially for fear of not being understood.”*

*“I’ve noticed my husband gets very bad tempered, particularly when I have to ask him to repeat anything or write it down ... he loses patience easily and snaps at everyone.”*

(BL)

## *Coming to terms with laryngectomy*

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You can see from these examples that everyone experiences a range of different emotions and it is natural to feel upset, emotional, scared, angry or depressed. As time goes by these are not so extreme and do settle down as you and your family readjust.

*“I feel a much stronger person since all of this has happened – stronger in myself.”*

(JB 12 months after operation)

One woman who had a laryngectomy described her thoughts about the depression in this way.

*“At first life felt like it was all in shades of grey but gradually the colours do come back again and I began to feel like my old self.”*

### *Where to go for help*

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You may want to talk to someone about these feelings – the Doctor, Nurses, Social Workers, Macmillan Nurse, Speech and Language Therapist – or you may find you cope with this by yourself or with your family. Please don't feel you can't approach someone in the hospital to talk through your feelings. The moods described above are usual and normal reactions as you come to terms with the loss of your larynx and the changes it has made to your life. Remember the hospital team are here to help you through this difficult time.

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