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Endoscopic Surgery of the Throat, Airway and Digestive Tract – Information Sheet

The upper aerodigestive tract includes the mouth, throat, larynx (voice box), the esophagus (swallowing tube which connects the mouth to the stomach) and trachea (air passages which lead to the lungs). Disease in one part of this system may be associated with disease in another part of this system (e.g. a lesion in the voice box may be associated with a lesion in the esophagus). Therefore, assessment sometimes requires a search of the entire system. Endoscopic surgery refers to the use of special scopes which allow visualization and treatment of abnormalities identified within the aerodigestive tract. Examples of lesions include cancerous growths, tumors, cysts, nodules, scar bands, polyps, etc.

Surgery is performed at the hospital under general anesthesia, usually as a “day surgery”. General anesthesia allows the patient to remain comfortable which the surgeon passes the endoscopes through the mouth to visualize difficult to access areas. At times, a microscope is attached to the scope to allow for magnification of an abnormality. Once good visualization is achieved, special instruments may be used to allow for very precise biopsies or excisions of various lesions – often under the guidance of the microscope. (Sometimes a laser is necessary, if so, your surgeon will discuss this)

Most often, the endoscopic surgery is performed as an outpatient procedure. However, in some instances you may be required to stay overnight for observation. There may be some postoperative hoarseness or discomfort of the throat (sore throat for 3-5 days), pain is usually mild to moderate. If necessary, pain medication may be prescribed. You can resume a regular diet the same day, if tolerated. If work is done on the vocal cords, however, you may be required NOT to speak for one to two weeks (your surgeon will instruct you). In such cases you should plan to be out of work during this time.

You may require medical therapy to prevent gastroesophageal reflux (i.e. acid splashing up from the stomach toward the voice box). It is a great time to stop smoking, if you haven't already. Also, vocal abuse or overexertion is a common cause of persistent or recurrent problems. Voice therapy may be recommended to help control this problem.