Heat and Moisture Exchange Devices (HME)

How is Breathing Changed after a Laryngectomy?
A total laryngectomy is the removal of the vocal cords or “voice box”. The windpipe and food pipe are surgically separated. After surgery, you will breathe only through an opening in your neck called a stoma, not through your nose. At first, many people have trouble changing to neck breathing because the breathing feels different. Some people may have problems with sputum at the stoma.

It is important to take care of your stoma. It needs to be kept moist and covered to filter the air you breathe in. Using a heat and moisture exchange device (HME) can do this.

What is a Heat and Moisture Exchange Device?
A heat and moisture exchange device is like a nose for the laryngectomy patient. It is a small round disc that is placed at the stoma and held in place with adhesive. The Atos and Blom-Singer companies make an HME system. Your Speech Language Pathologist will work with you to select the one that is right for you.

How does Using a Heat and Moisture Exchange Device Help?
- The temperature of the air you breathe in will be warmer.
- The air you breathe in will be humidified.
- The air you breathe in will be filtered from dust.
- Your breathing resistance will increase which will help your lungs.
- You will cough less and have less sputum.
- There can be a decrease in sleeping problems, fatigue and anxiety

Is a Heat and Moisture Exchange Device Right for Me?
To see if an HME is right for you, you will need to have a 2 week trial. During this time you must use the HME all of the time, including when you sleep. At the beginning you may feel that your breathing is more difficult because of the resistance when you breathe in. Breathing will get easier over time.

Your Speech Therapist has samples of HMEs. A doctor’s prescription is needed to get an HME and is covered by most insurance plans.