Everyone's experience with their cancer journey is different. We are all unique individuals and very special. Whatever happens when you are told you have cancer you are likely to experience a crescendo of mixed emotions, despite being surrounded by family and friends. The shock can be devastating and you shut off; feeling desperately alone. Try and ensure at hospital visits you are never alone.

The enormity of having to have surgery to your face/head making you look 'different' is likely to have a dramatic emotional affect upon you and your family and friends. It helps and is easier to deal with if you are given information about some of the problems you may have, eating, swallowing and speaking. You may need the support of a Dietician and a Speech and Language Therapist.

Ask your consultant

After surgery, when you return home many of the problems can begin. You may find you cannot cope on your own after being in the safe hands of the professionals who cared for you in hospital. You may start to withdraw into yourself and shut everyone out. This is perfectly normal . The enormity of what you have been through; patients, family and friends can be paralyzed by a hopeless longing for a face that isn't there, the feelings of isolation and rejection come hand in hand with facial disfigurement.

Let's Face It is an international mutual self-help organization dealing with facial disfigurement It is dedicated to helping those who are facially disfigured, their loved ones and the professionals who care for them. We are the experts, we have been 'there' and understand the problems that arise from living with a 'different' face. Quality of life is essential, by sharing , caring and supporting our network members, our ***Let's Face It*** family can make a difference in each others lives.

Quality of Life

Your quality of life is what counts, and it is important to understand that you don't have to put up with any problems that arise. Ask what is going to happen. Ask about reconstruction. Ask whatever you need to. Some of the questions that may arise are:

You are likely to suffer from a dry mouth, especially if you are having a course of chemotherapy. Is this something you are going to live with for the rest of your life?

Will you loose your sense of taste? For how long?

You may loose your sense of smell? For how long?

And how about your hearing? Will that be affected?

Will I loose my hair? My eye brows? My beard & moustache?

Where can I get an eye patch from?

Who will supply me with dressings?

Be prepared to acknowledge fatigue and stress - this is a normal part of the healing process.

What happens when I start a course of radiotherapy?

A dry mouth and ulcers are the first noticeable problems. You may have difficulty eating and drinking. Weight loss is common through lack of being able to eat normal foods.

Try warm milky drinks, yoghurt, junket. *Fortisip & Nutilis* are available on prescription. You may loose your sense of taste and smell for a while, but these will recover in time. You may become constipated. If this should occur tell the nurse/ oncologist who will advise you what to take to relieve the problem.

How do I manage a dry mouth?

If you have radiation to the head & neck area there is a possibility this treatment could damage your salivary glands and result in the sensation of dryness.. Ask how long these symptoms will last. Everyone is different but be prepared to be told that it may be for the rest of your life.

One of the kindest products to help with this symptom is the *BioXtra* range. It has ultra-mild toothpaste, mouth rinse, chewing gum, lozenges, spray gel and moisturizing gel. They work instantly and the moisturizing gel works for up to eight hours so you can get a good night's sleep. Contact ***Let's Face It*** for further details and how to obtain free samples.

Will I loose my appetite?

Yes. The discomfort of a dry mouth and being unable to eat due to ulceration add to a general desire to avoid trying soft foods. After a while, your appetite can be restored with warm milky drinks, dunking arrowroot biscuits in tea, sucking a chocolate button. Gradually you will be able to eat more pureed food and there may be a salty or tinny taste in your mouth. Small frequent soft foods may be easier and eat when you are hungry rather than set meal times. You can make your food more interesting. There are recipe books for people who have difficulty chewing. The Non Chew Cook Book is recommended by ***Let's Face It.*** Ask to speak to a Dietician for eating advice. You will need food supplements initially. Look on ***Let's Face It*** website for details.

www.lets-face-it.org.uk

What will happen to my teeth?

If you don't really look after any remaining teeth you have a strong possibility of losing them! Visit your dentist regularly and ask them to speak to your Consultant. This will ensure you get the individual treatment you require. If you have false teeth and have difficulty wearing them due to weight loss and they are slipping or seeming too large, seek help from your dentist. There is an adhesive for dentures called *Secure* that doesn't require saliva to help keep the teeth in place. Contact ***Let's Face It*** for some free samples.

What is an obturator?

An obturator is a replacement for the palate and dentures that have been removed after radical surgery. It looks like a denture but functions by fitting over the gap in the palate, enabling the patient to speak, eat food and swallow liquids. Many patients have half their palate removed and the obturator is held in place with clasps that fit on the patient's remaining teeth. The obturator requires cleaning morning and night and after eating. This can be done by using a tooth brush and scrubbing the denture clean. To enable you to clean the obturator safely, fill the wash basin half-full with water and clean the obturator over it. If you should drop the appliance, you will only get a splash rather than a broken clasp or tooth.