



Early Stages of Your Head and Neck Cancer Journey

The early stages following a diagnosis of head and neck cancer can feel like an emotional whirlwind. Many people describe this period as a time of shock, uncertainty, and information overload. You may be meeting several different healthcare professionals, undergoing additional tests, and trying to understand what your diagnosis means. It is completely normal to feel frightened, confused, or overwhelmed, and to have many questions about what lies ahead.

During this stage, your specialist team will work to build a complete picture of your cancer and your overall health. You may undergo further scans, blood tests, dental assessments, and discussions with members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT), including surgeons, oncologists, specialist nurses, speech and language therapists, and dietitians. These assessments help the team recommend the most effective treatment plan while also considering your quality of life, communication, nutrition, and recovery needs.

This is also the time when practical preparations often begin. You may be advised to stop smoking, improve your nutrition, attend dental appointments, or complete baseline swallowing and speech assessments. Some patients may require a feeding tube or additional procedures before treatment starts. While these preparations can feel daunting, they are designed to give you the strongest possible foundation for treatment and recovery.

Emotionally, the early stages can be one of the most challenging parts of the journey. Family members and caregivers are often processing the diagnosis alongside you and may also feel anxious and uncertain. Accepting support from loved ones and from organisations such as The Swallows can make a significant difference. Speaking with others who have experienced head and neck cancer can provide reassurance, practical advice, and hope at a time when everything feels unfamiliar.

Although the road ahead may seem daunting, the early stages are about building your support network and preparing for the next steps with confidence. Your healthcare team is there to guide you, and The Swallows is available 24 hours a day to offer practical information, emotional support, and encouragement. Taking one step at a time can make the journey feel more manageable and help you feel more in control.

24/7 Support Line

07504 725 059



24/7 Text Line

07830 929 400