

Extending the life of your voice prosthesis (VP): Field suggestions and anecdotal treatments

The life of the voice prosthesis varies among individuals. Device life is dependent on many factors including diet, overall health, current medical treatments, the health of your mouth, cleaning routine of the voice prosthesis, your medications, your gastrointestinal health and if you have gastroesophageal reflux. We all have various bacteria and fungi that live within our bodies that can grow into the silicone of the VP and cause it to fail. Below are some suggestions. Before trying any, you should check with your doctor as they could interfere with medical treatments.

1. Keep your mouth as clean as possible. This is important as the bacteria and fungi in your mouth can grow into the voice prosthesis causing it to eventually fail (Williams et al., 2011).
 - Brush your teeth after each meal.
 - A mechanical toothbrush is helpful.
 - Make sure to brush your tongue.
 - Colgate™ Total™ toothpaste is suggested.
 - If you don't have teeth, you will at least need to brush your tongue as it houses a lot of fungi and bacteria. Consult your dentist for additional suggestions.
 - If you wear dentures, make sure to remove and clean them at least every night or as directed by your dentist.
 - Avoid mouthwashes that contain alcohol as they can cause dry mouth.
 - If you are undergoing radiation therapy, make sure to use your salt and soda rinses as directed by your doctor.
2. Your diet can also affect the life of your voice prosthesis.
 - Avoid sugar and foods that contain yeast (i.e., beer, carbohydrates).
 - Drink buttermilk (Busscher et al., 1998).
 - Take probiotic liquids and supplements containing *L. lactis* 53 and *S. thermophilus* B (Free et al., 2001).
 - Drink one 65mL Yakult® yogurt drink after each meal (Schwandt et al., 2005).
 - Drink caffeinated soft drinks like, Coca-Cola® (Free et al., 2000).
3. If you are taking antibiotics, you may want to ask your doctor to prescribe an antifungal medication at the same time.

4. Clean your Provox® voice prosthesis at least twice a day and after meals with the Provox® Brush and Flush (Free et al., 2003). This is very important as the Brush and Flush help remove mucus and food particles from the prosthesis.
 - Cleaning should begin the day your new Provox voice prosthesis is placed.
 - Avoid vigorous use of the Provox Brush.
 - Flush your prosthesis with warm water (Brook, 2013) using Provox Flush.
 - Consult the Instructions for Use for your specific Provox voice prosthesis and the Provox Brush and Flush.
5. If you are using Nystatin Swish and Swallow daily, consult with your doctor to see if this medicine is necessary. Nystatin contains sugar which may negatively affect the health of your mouth and the life of your prosthesis.
6. If you have been diagnosed with gastroesophageal reflux (GERD), make sure you take your prescribed anti-reflux medicine as directed. It is also important to follow any diet and behavioral suggestions. Research shows that patients diagnosed with GERD have early failure of their prosthesis (Boscolo et al., 2007; Lorenz et al., 2010).

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