Superior Vena Cava Syndrome
Patient Education

The superior vena cava (SVC) is the main vein that carries blood from the upper part of the body to the heart. The blood flow through this vein can be blocked by narrowing of the vein caused by a tumor or a blood clot.

Notify your doctor right away if you have any of these problems:

- Having a hard time breathing.
- Coughing more.
- Swelling of your face, neck (collar feels tight), chest or arms.
- Drowsiness, headache, dizziness, visual changes.
- Hoarseness of your voice, chest pain or difficulty swallowing.

Treatment:
Treating your cancer is the best way to get rid of SVC syndrome that is caused by cancer. The type of treatment you are given will depend on your cancer. Treatment may include radiotherapy or chemotherapy. Other medications (such as; diuretics, steroids, anti-inflammatory drugs or blood thinning medicine if the cause is a blood clot) may also be given.

SVC syndrome caused by a blood clot requires thinning of the blood and sometimes removal of a central venous catheter (e.g. mediport) that may be present.

Things you can do to help:

- Sleeping with your head on two pillows helps make your breathing easier.
- Avoid bending over at the waist.
- Avoid getting constipated.
- Avoid injury to the skin on your head, neck and arms. Inspect the skin on your head, neck, and arms and notify your doctor or nurse if you notice any redness, sores, bleeding, or bruising.
- To reduce shortness of breath or difficulty breathing:
  - Stay in an upright sitting position.
  - Take frequent rest periods.
  - Try to take deep breaths, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth if you feel short of breath.