

# Rehabilitative Swallowing Exercises

Information for Head and Neck  
Radiotherapy and Chemoradiotherapy Patients

Speech and  
Language Therapy

Radiotherapy to the head and neck can lead to long-term swallowing problems called **dysphagia**. Patients with dysphagia have a hard time swallowing food, liquid or saliva. Swallowing problems can occur during treatment, or may develop and continue long after radiotherapy treatment has ended.

These exercises may help improve and/or maintain your swallowing function. Your Speech and Language Therapist will select the most appropriate exercises for you and show you how to do these exercises. If you have any questions about these exercises, please ask your Speech and Language Therapist.

## Strap Muscle Exercises

The strap muscles in the neck move the voice box up and out of the way to keep food and liquid from entering the lungs when you swallow. These exercises are designed to increase flexibility and strength.

**Do the Shaker exercise (parts 1 and 2) 3 times each day:**

### 1. Shaker Exercise (part 1)

- Lie down on your back on the bed. **Do not use a pillow** (your shoulders must be flat against the surface).
- Keep your shoulders flat against the bed, and lift up your head, bringing your chin down to your chest (until you can see your toes).
- Keep your head lifted for **60 seconds**, and then lower your head and rest for 60 seconds.

**Repeat these steps 3 times.**

### 2. Shaker Exercise (part 2)

- Lie down on your back on the bed. **Do not use a pillow** (your shoulders must be flat against the surface).
- Keep your shoulders flat against the bed, and lift up your head, bringing your chin down to your chest. Then immediately lower your head.

**Repeat these steps 30 times.**

**Repeat each exercise below 5 times. Do 5-10 sets of the exercises each day:**

### 3. Mendelsohn Exercise

- Put your fingers over the bulge at the front of your throat (this is your voice box).
- Swallow, and feel the Adam's apple lift and lower while you swallow.
- Now, swallow and hold the Adam's apple up for at least three seconds by squeezing your throat muscles.

### 4. Stretch Exercise

- Tilt your head back and open your mouth.
- Stick out your jaw, and then push your jaw upward towards your nose. You should feel a stretch along the front of your neck.
- Hold this position for 5 seconds.

## Airway Protection Exercises

As you swallow, it is important for the voice box to close tightly to keep food or liquid from entering the lungs. Food and/or drink going the wrong way may mean you are **aspirating**. These exercises are designed to help the voice box close during swallowing.

### 5. Supraglottic Swallow

- Hold your breath tightly (imagine bearing down). Now, swallow your saliva twice, release your breath with a sharp cough, and swallow again.

### 6. Pitch Glides

- Sing 'ee' or 'ah' starting in a low tone and then slowly raise your tone to your highest pitch. Hold this high pitch for 10-20 seconds.

## Base of Tongue Exercises

The base of tongue is the "pump" that pushes food through the throat and into the food pipe (oesophagus). These exercises are designed to strengthen the base of tongue.

### 7. Masako Exercise

- Stick out your tongue and hold it between your lips or teeth. Swallow your saliva, keeping your tongue held.

### 8. Effortful Swallow

- Swallow as hard as you can with food or saliva. Push as hard as you can with the tongue against the roof of your mouth while you swallow.

### 9. Yawn

- Yawn. Hold your tongue at the back for 5-10 seconds.

## Jaw Exercises

Adequate mouth opening is essential for eating, drinking and oral hygiene. Reduced mouth opening is called **trismus**. These exercises are designed to increase flexibility.

### 10. Jaw Opening

- Open your mouth as far as possible. Hold for 5-10 seconds and then close.

### 11. Jaw Rotation/Imaginary Chewing

- Pretend to chew, rotating the jaw in circular motions in both directions. Start with the mouth closed and gradually open wider.

**Individual appointments can be arranged as necessary. If you are having specific problems please contact the team as per the details below.**

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Adapted from the Rehabilitative Swallowing Exercise Sheet ©2008 The M.D. Anderson Cancer Centre

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Version 1, Issue Date: January 2018, Revision Date: January 2020