



Swallowing Exercises

for head and neck radiation therapy

Swallowing is a complicated process involving many structures, muscles and nerves in the head and neck area. Radiation therapy to this area can cause changes to your swallowing. Difficulty in swallowing is also called **dysphagia**.

When there is difficulty swallowing, it can be hard to:

- Eat and drink easily and comfortably
- Maintain your weight

You may also be at risk of aspiration. This is when food or drinks enter the airway and lungs instead of the stomach. Aspiration can cause lung infections.

Speech Therapy

The speech therapist is an allied health professional who works in communication and swallowing. While undergoing radiation therapy, you will meet a speech therapist to work on exercises to maintain your swallowing function. After treatment is complete, your speech therapist will continue to see you regularly to check on your swallowing function.

Here are some exercises you can do to maintain your swallowing function. Even if you do not have dysphagia, you should do these exercises to prevent swallowing difficulties from developing. Once dysphagia develops, it can be hard to treat.

Range-of-Motion Exercises

You should aim to do these exercises **3** times a day.

□ Neck Stretches



Sit up straight.
Turn your head to the left and look over your left shoulder. Place your left hand on your cheek to extend the stretch.
Hold for **10 seconds**.
Do this **10 times**.



Repeat this for the other side.
Hold for **10 seconds**.
Do this **10 times**.



Lift your head gently and look up.
Hold for **10 seconds**.
Do this **10 times**.



Hold your chin to your chest .
Hold for **10 seconds**.
Do this **10 times**.

□ Jaw Stretches



Open your mouth wide until you can feel a stretch. You should not feel pain.

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.



Move your jaw to one side.

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.



Then move it to the other side.

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.

□ Tongue Stretches

For the following exercises, you can use a moist towel to pull your tongue lightly if necessary.



Stick out your tongue as far as you can feel a stretch.

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.



Stretch your tongue to one side.

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.



Then stretch it to the other side.

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.



Stretch your tongue upwards.

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.



Stretch your tongue downwards

Hold for **10 seconds**.

Do this **10 times**.

Swallowing Exercises

You should aim to do these exercises **3** times a day.

☐ Tongue-hold swallows (Masako Manoeuvre)



1. Stick your tongue out and hold it between your teeth and lips.
 2. Swallow saliva with your tongue in this position.
 3. Do this **10** times.
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☐ Modified Shakers' Exercise



1. Sit straight and relax.
2. Put your thumbs under your chin.
3. Push your chin down against your thumbs.
4. Hold for 1 minute. Repeat this 3 times.

Next,

1. Hold for 1 second, but repeat 30 times.



Special note:

- You should feel the front of your neck exercise
 - You should not feel pain at the back of your neck
 - **DO NOT** push your head forward
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Effortful swallow

1. Swallow saliva as hard as you can.
2. Push your tongue towards the roof of the mouth when swallowing.
3. Do this **10** times.

Mendelsohn's Manoeuvre

1. Put your hand on your throat and feel your Adam's apple moving up and down when you swallow.
 2. Now swallow normally, but hold your Adam's apple at the highest point for 3 seconds.
 3. Squeeze your throat muscles hard or hold your breath to do this
 4. Relax and breathe normally.
 5. Do this **10** times.
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