Swallowing Exercises

Swallowing Lab
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
University Health Network

A Program for Head and Neck Patients

Radiation 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 or continue long after radiation treatment has ended.

These exercises may help reduce the potential for long-term swallowing problems and/or improve swallowing function. If you have any questions about these exercises, please ask your speech pathologist.

Goal: Do a complete set (10 repetitions) of the each exercise three times each day. All the exercise sets together should take about 10 minutes to complete. **Please note:** You may require short breaks or sips of water during any given set.

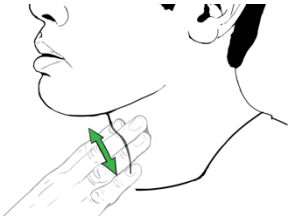
Floor of mouth and Jaw Exercises

The floor of mouth muscles move the voice box up and out of the way to keep food and liquid from entering the lungs when you swallow. The jaw muscles help open your mouth wide. These exercises aim to increase flexibility and strength.

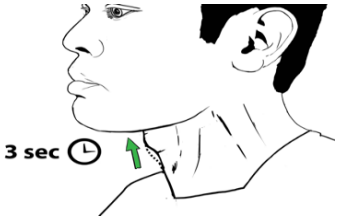
1. Mendelsohn Exercise



Step 1: Place your fingers over the bulge at the front of your throat; this is sometimes called the Adam's apple.



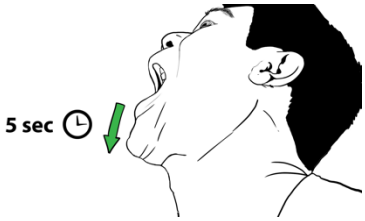
Step 2: Swallow, and as you do feel the Adam's apple lift and lower.



Step 3: Swallow again, and as you do squeeze your throat muscles to hold the Adam's apple up for three seconds.

Repeat Step 3 **10 times**.

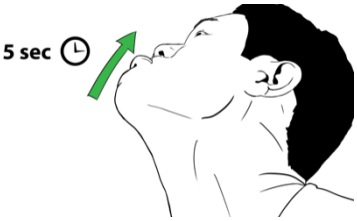
2. Jaw Stretch Exercise



Step 1: Tilt your head back, and open your mouth as wide as you can. Hold this position for five seconds.



Step 2: While holding your head back, stick your jaw forward.



Step 3: Still with your head back, move your jaw upward toward your nose and try to close your lips. You should feel a stretch along the front of your neck. Hold this position for five seconds.

Repeat Steps 1 to 3 **10 times**.

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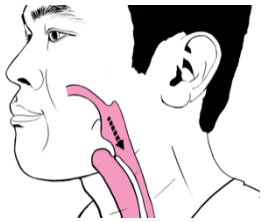
Airway Protection Exercise

As you swallow, it is important for the voice box to close tightly to keep food or liquid from entering the lungs. This exercise aims to help the voice box close during swallowing.

3. Supraglottic Swallow



Step 1: Prepare by breathing in through your nose. Then hold your breath tightly.



Step 2: Keeping your breath held tight, swallow your saliva once.



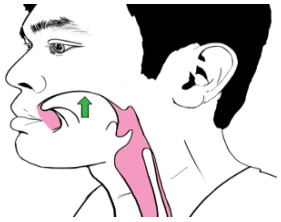
Step 3: Release your breath with a sharp cough or throat clear. Then swallow again.

Repeat Steps 1 to 3 **10 times**.

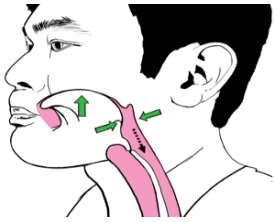
Constrictor and Base of Tongue Exercises

The base of tongue is the "pump" that along with constricting muscles in the throat pushes food through the throat and into the food pipe (esophagus). These exercises aim to strengthen the base of the tongue and constrictor muscles.

4. Effortful Swallow



Step 1: Push as hard as you can with the tongue against the roof of your mouth.



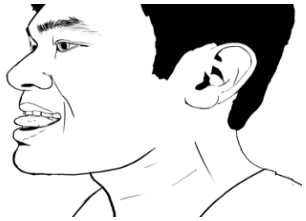
Step 2: While holding your tongue in that position, swallow your saliva as hard as you can, squeezing all the muscles in your throat.



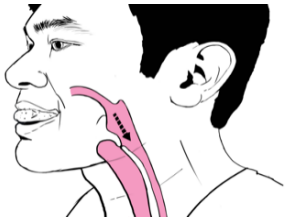
Step 3: After your swallow; relax.

Repeat Steps 1 to 3 **10 times**.

5. Masako Exercise



Step 1: Stick out your tongue and hold it gently between your lips or teeth.



Step 2: Holding your tongue in this position, try to swallow your saliva.



Step 3: After your swallow, relax.

Repeat Steps 1 to 3 **10 times**.