

Swallowing Exercises

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 has ended.


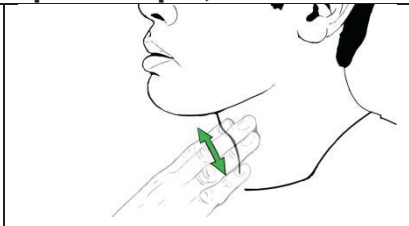
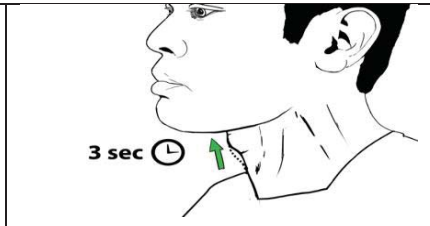
These exercises may help reduce the potential for long-term swallowing problems and improve swallowing function. Ask your speech pathologist if you have questions about these exercises.

Goal: Do a set (10 repetitions) of each exercise 3 times a day. It should take about 10 minutes to complete all the exercises. Take short breaks or sips of water during any given set if needed.

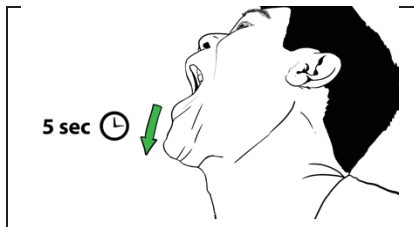
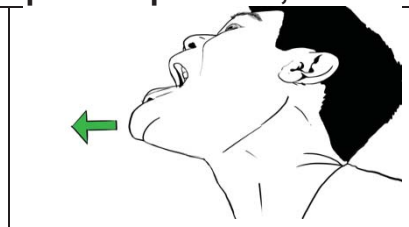
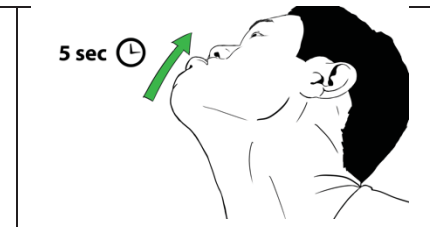
Floor of Mouth and Jaw Exercises

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 – Repeat Step 3, 10 times

		
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

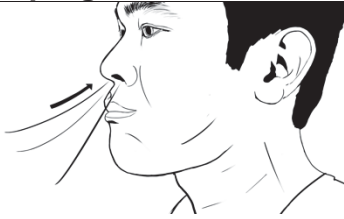


2. Jaw Stretch Exercise – Repeat Steps 1 to 3, 10 times

		
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

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.

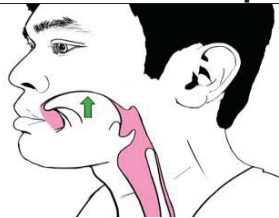
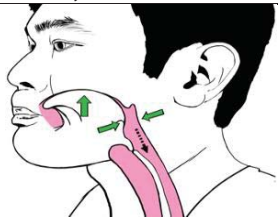

3. Supraglottic Swallow – Repeat Steps 1 to 3, 10 times

		
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.


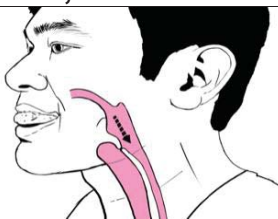

Base of Tongue and Throat Exercises

The base of the tongue is the “pump.” It works with the throat to constrict the muscles that push food through the throat and into the food pipe (esophagus). These exercises aim to strengthen the base of the tongue and throat muscles.

4. Effortful Swallow – Repeat Steps 1 to 3, 10 times

		
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.

5. Masako Exercise – Repeat Steps 1 to 3, 10 times

		
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 you swallow, relax.

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