

CANCER INSTITUTE PROGRAMS

PROPHYLACTIC SWALLOWING EXERCISES

This information is provided to assist you, as you undergo radiation therapy to the head and neck region. Swallowing is a complex act that involves coordinated activity of the mouth, throat and esophagus. Swallowing impairment can be caused by a wide range of factors, including stroke, tumor, surgery **and radiation therapy**. Treatment to this region can potentially cause swallowing impairments, related to decreased elasticity and weakness of the muscles used to swallow. In addition, your physician may recommend the placement of a Gastrostomy Tube (G-tube). This tube will assist you in the maintenance of fluid and nutrition intake. The use of this tube during treatment and for a short time after may cause weakening of those muscles from lack of use. We are providing these exercises to allow the best possible prevention of this side effect. These exercises will help to maintain the function of the tongue and pharynx (throat).

We suggest practicing these exercises before you experience any treatment related discomfort and as soon as you are able, after the completion of treatment. Your physician may also refer you to the Speech Therapist, a specialist in the treatment of swallowing impairment.

Lingual (Tongue) Exercises for Head and Neck Patients

1. Take teaspoon-sized amount of yogurt, applesauce or pudding and swallow **2 times, with extra effort**. A lollipop may also be used.
Repeat 6-8 times and perform 3 times per day.
2. This exercise can be performed with saliva only or a small amount of liquid. Place your tongue tip between your front teeth and hold it there while swallowing as hard as you can.
Repeat 10 times, to be performed daily.
3. Using a tongue depressor or hollow side of a spoon, press your tongue tip as hard as you can against it. Make the “push” come from your tongue, not the spoon, **holding each push for 5 seconds**.
Repeat 10 times, to be performed daily.
4. Practice stretching the jaw as wide as possible, as if you are yawning.
Perform 10 times daily.