Swallowing Exercises for Patients with Head and Neck Cancer

It is important to do your swallowing exercises every day to help keep or restore your ability to swallow. You need to start doing these exercises before you start radiation treatment and keep doing them during treatment and after your radiation treatments have ended.

Swallowing exercises help strengthen the muscles you use to swallow and prevents muscle loss (atrophy) and scarring. You may have some pain when swallowing or doing these exercises. To reduce pain with swallowing, it is helpful to take your pain medicine 20 to 30 minutes before doing your exercises.

**Do not use food or liquid with these exercises.** If your mouth is dry or it is hard for you to start a swallow, you may only take sips of fluid in between exercises.

Do your exercises as directed by your speech therapist. If you have questions or trouble doing any of these exercises, talk with your speech therapist.

1. **Masako Maneuver**

   This exercise is done to strengthen the base of your tongue, which helps move food through your throat. When the base of your tongue is weak or stiff, you may have trouble swallowing solid foods and feel like food is “stuck” in your throat.

   - Place the tip of your tongue between your front teeth or gums.
   - Hold gently and swallow, keeping your tongue between your teeth or gums.

   Do this exercise _____ times each day.
2. **Effortful Swallow**

   This exercise will help your swallowing muscles get stronger and increase your muscle flexibility and range of motion.

   - Swallow your saliva while you squeeze all of your mouth and neck muscles very hard.

   Do this exercise _____ times each day.

3. **Jaw Stretch**

   This exercise will help prevent trismus (when your jaw muscles get tight and you have trouble opening your mouth). Trismus is much easier to prevent than fix once it begins. Tight jaw muscles can make it hard to chew, swallow and talk. It can also make it hard to clean your teeth, gums and mouth or have dental work done. This is one of the easiest and most helpful exercises you can do.

   - Yawn and hold your mouth open as wide as you can for 5 seconds.

   Do this exercise _____ times each day.

4. **Tongue Pull-Back**

   This exercise helps with tongue strength and range of motion.

   - Stick your tongue straight out and then pull it as far back in your mouth as you can. Hold for 2 seconds.

   Do this exercise _____ times each day.

5. **Mendelsohn Maneuver**

   This exercise helps raise the larynx and open the esophagus when swallowing. This helps keep food and liquid from going down the wrong way.

   - Swallow your saliva and feel your voice box lift, but do not let it drop. Hold it with your muscles for 1-2 seconds. Release and repeat.

   Do this exercise _____ times each day.