

Speech Pathology
Royal North Shore and Ryde Hospitals

Radiotherapy Swallowing Exercises

Swallowing exercises during radiotherapy are important. Swallowing exercises will help keep the muscles in your throat strong and flexible. Doing the exercises will help you to swallow more easily when your treatment is finished.

Eating and drinking (even if it's just liquids) can help improve your ability to swallow during and after treatment. Our main focus during treatment is to keep you eating or at least drinking liquids.

Time spent practicing the exercises will be different for everyone. Some people will be able to do the exercises for longer than others. This is OK. Practice the exercises until the muscles in your throat feel tired. You might practice 3 x day for 5 minutes at a time or 10x day for 1 minute. It is important to swallow frequently, many times a day (i.e. high intensity, high frequency).

Below are a list of swallowing exercises. These exercises target swallowing areas that are likely impacted by the tumour and radiation.

Eating and drinking

Eating and drinking is the best exercise for your swallow muscles. To help you eat and drink during treatment you can:

- Eat soft and easy-to-chew foods
- **Drink at least 3-4 cups of liquid per day** (averaging minimum 400-500mls / day) if solid food is too hard to eat.

Plan to have your meals or snacks to fit in with periods of pain relief. For example, we may recommend taking numbing medication (Mucosoothe, or Xylocaine Viscous) 15 minutes before eating/drinking to dull the pain. This is a good time to swallow for exercise.

Tongue hold or Masako Manoeuvre

This exercise strengthens your throat muscles to move food down into your food pipe

- Hold your tongue tip with your front teeth or fingers and swallow. Feel the back of the tongue and the muscles in your throat work hard.



Mendelsohn's Manoeuvre

This exercise strengthens your swallow muscles under your chin. These muscles help move food down your throat

- Swallow normally. Feel your voice box go up and down
- Imagine a string from your Adam's Apple to your ear
- Now swallow with your fingers lightly on your Adam's apple but keep it elevated for 3 seconds before letting your Adam's apple relax. Imagine pulling on the 'string' to keep it elevated
- Don't over-use your jaw or push your tongue during this exercise
- Remember to ACTUALLY swallow some saliva. You are not simply "pushing"
- You might like to drink water IN BETWEEN these exercises



Jaw exercise

This exercise aims to help with moving your jaw. Moving your jaw makes it easier to eat and chew. Open your mouth as wide as you can, keep it open for 5 seconds

- Gently hold open your mouth with a finger to stretch it open a little further
- Open your mouth as wide as you can against resistance (push against your hand)

Saliva swallow

- Do effortful swallows to prevent saliva build up in your throat (each time you swallow, squeeze very hard with your tongue and throat)
- If it is hard to swallow your saliva because of dryness and sticky saliva, try it with mouth sprays to wet your mouth

When you finish radiotherapy, you will continue to see the speech pathologist until your 12-week PET scan. Three months after your treatment you will have a formal review with the doctors. The review will be at the Tuesday Head and Neck clinic. If you are still having problems at your 3 month review, you will be seen by a Speech Pathologist.

If your swallowing changes or becomes hard after treatment, even if this is years after, please contact our department to be seen as soon as possible by our speech pathology team.

Any questions or concerns, please contact the Speech Pathology Department:

RNSH – 02 9463 1622

Ryde – 02 9858 7812