

Swallowing Exercises for Patients with Head & Neck Cancer Receiving Radiation Treatment



UHN

What you can do to eat, drink and heal during and after your radiation treatment

What do I need to know about my radiation treatment and swallowing problems?

Radiation treatment can cause scarring and stiffening (hardening) of the muscles in the mouth and throat causing them not to function at their best. This can cause swallowing problems.

Why is it important to avoid swallowing problems?

Swallowing problems can affect your ability to eat solid food, drink liquids or swallow your own saliva (spit). Being able to eat and drink to keep your body well nourished and hydrated are important during and after your radiation treatment to help you heal. Swallowing problems can become life-long (chronic). They can also cause the following:

- Chest infection (pneumonia)
- Weight loss
- Dehydration (not having enough water in your body)
- Needing a feeding tube

What can I do to reduce my risk of having swallowing problems?

Exercises that help you to keep swallowing will help you maintain your ability to eat and drink and help you reduce swallowing problems that could develop from treatment. These exercises will reduce swallowing problems from treatment even if you require a feeding tube.

This pamphlet has 8 exercises that you can do everyday to help you keep your ability to swallow.

How to do your swallowing exercises

- Do each exercise 5-10 times in a row, every hour that you are awake
- Do these exercises before you start your treatment, during your treatment, and after your treatment is finished
- Sit up straight in a chair and use a mirror while doing the exercises
- **IMPORTANT:** Do not have any food or drink in your mouth while doing these exercises

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

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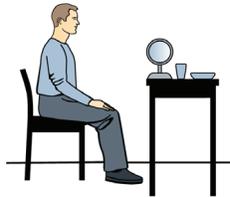
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To see a video on how to do your swallowing exercises, go to www.uhn.on.ca On the top left menu, click on “Patients & Visitors” then “Health Information”. Click on “List of Videos” along the right side of your screen. You can also type this in your internet browser: www.uhn.on.ca/Patients_&_Visitors/health_info/videos/videos.asp

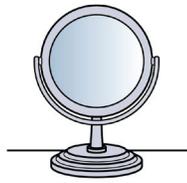
Remember to keep swallowing

- It is important to continue to swallow through the course of your radiation treatment, even if it is just sips of water several times a day.
- You may feel very tired and be in pain during your radiation treatment, but try to continue with the exercises as best as you can. Your health care team is here to support you, so ask for help when you need it.

Useful Tips:



Sit Upright.



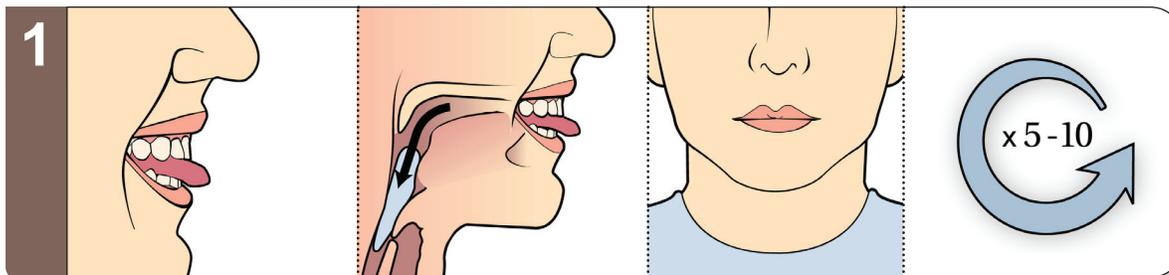
Use a mirror.



Rinse and spit as needed.

How To Make Your Swallow Stronger

Repeat these exercises 5-10 times. Remember to keep your mouth wet!

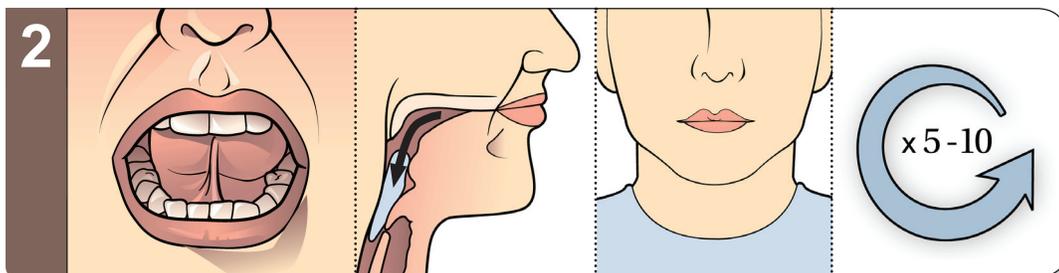


Stick out the tip of your tongue. Hold it between your teeth or lips.

Now, try to swallow your spit with your tongue in that position.

Relax.

Repeat 5 to 10 times.

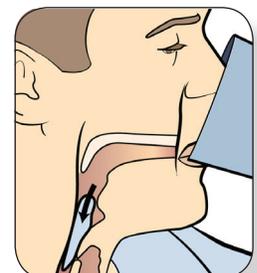


Press your tongue against the roof of your mouth as hard as you can.

With your mouth closed, swallow your spit (saliva) as hard as you can.

Relax.

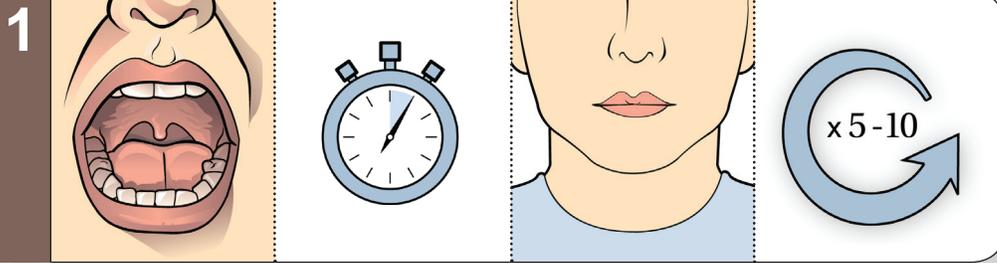
Repeat 5 to 10 times.



Try swallowing some water now

Take a small sip of water and swallow it. You may need to swallow it a few times to get it all down. Clear your throat or cough if you need to.

Keep The Muscles in your Mouth Moving

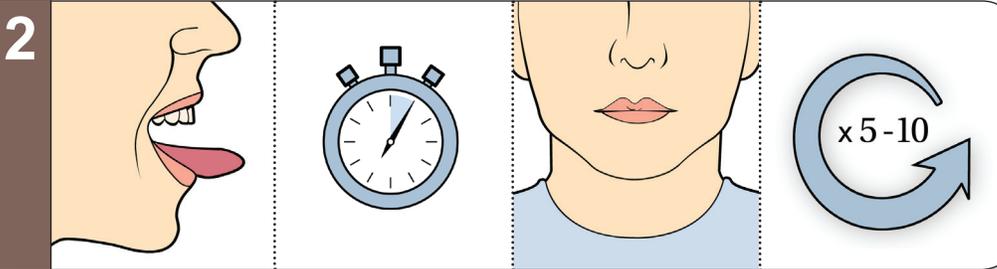


Open your mouth as big as you can.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Relax.

Repeat 5 to 10 times.

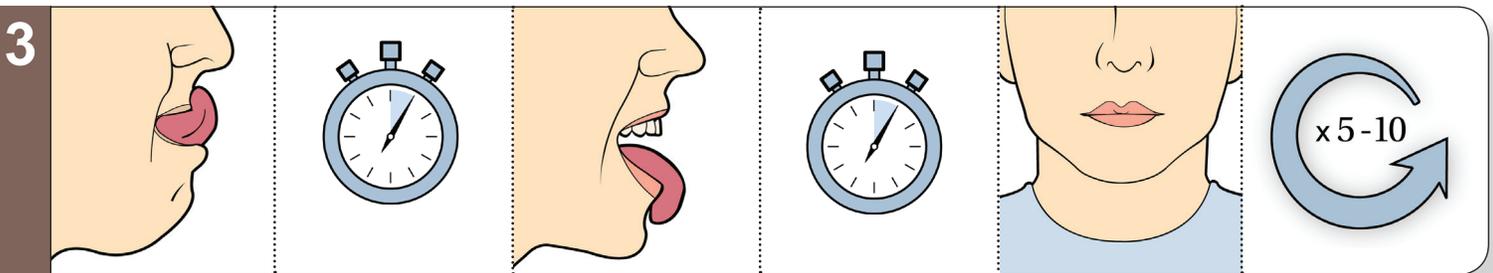


Stick your tongue out as far as it can go.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Relax.

Repeat 5 to 10 times.



Move your tongue up towards your nose.

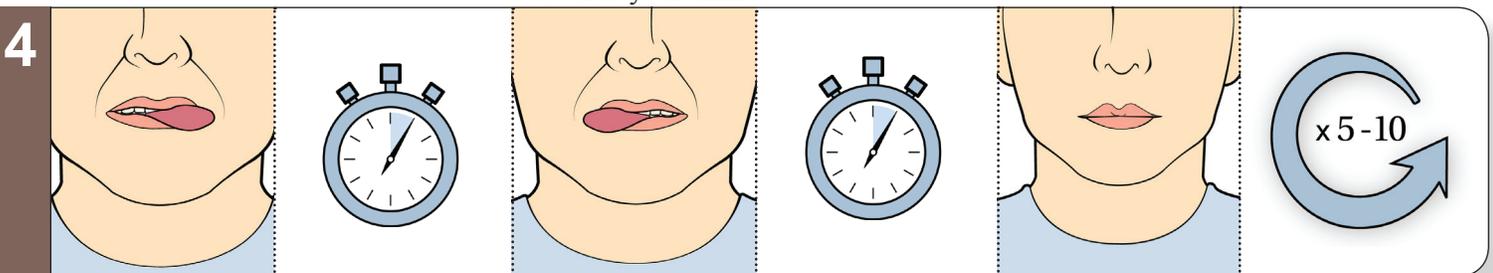
Hold for 5 seconds.

Now move your tongue down towards your chin.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Relax.

Repeat 5 to 10 times.



Move your tongue to the left side.

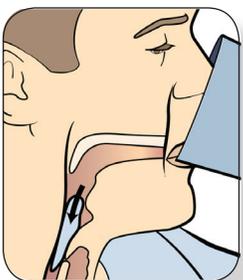
Hold for 5 seconds.

Now move your tongue to the right side.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Relax.

Repeat 5 to 10 times.



Try swallowing some water now

Take a small sip of water and swallow it. You may need to swallow it a few times to get it all down. Clear your throat or cough if you need to.

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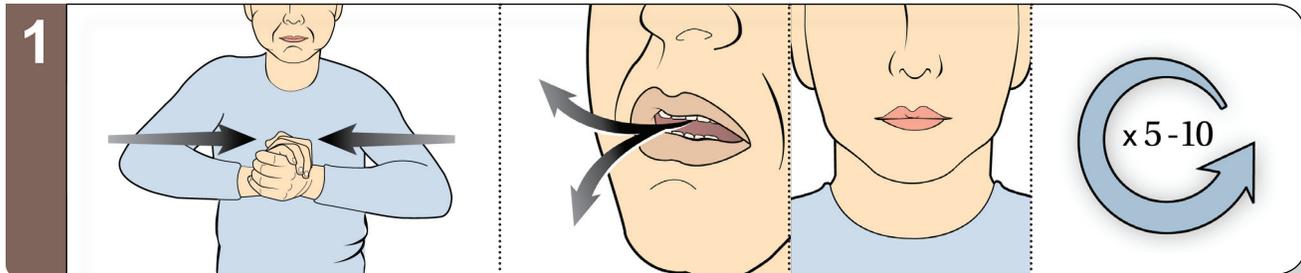
Practice Closing your Windpipe

Repeat these exercises 5-10 times.



Note: Do not do these exercises if you feel lightheaded or have heart problems. Also, do not do these exercises for one week after receiving a feeding tube.

Please check with your nurse or doctor if you have concerns or questions about doing these exercises.

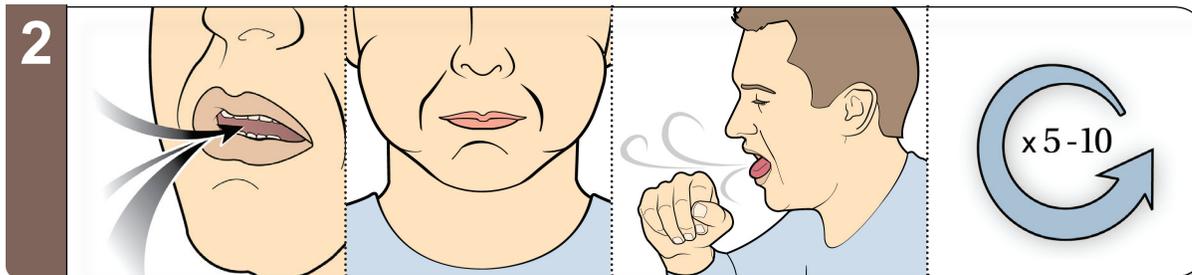


Hold your breath and put your hands together and push for 1 second.

Then breathe out.

Relax.

Repeat 5 to 10 times.



Take a breath and hold it.

Then cough out as strong as possible.

Repeat 5 to 10 times .

Who can I ask for help with doing my exercises?

If you need help or have questions about these exercises please ask a member of your health care team, such as your:

- Speech Language Pathologist
- Radiation Therapist
- Nurse
- Doctor (Oncologist)

How do I know if I have a swallowing problem?

A swallowing problem can be any change in the way you swallow food, drink or your saliva (spit).

Signs that you have a swallowing problem can include experiencing the following while eating or drinking:

- Coughing or throat clearing
- A wet or gurgly sounding voice
- Food sticking in your throat
- Needing extra liquid to wash down solid foods
- Liquid coming “back up” through your nose or mouth
- Needing more effort to swallow
- Extra swallows needed to clear a mouthful
- Trouble chewing
- Needing more time to complete a meal

References: The University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center Swallowing Exercise Protocol, by Dr. Jan Lewin