



Top Exercises for Dysphagia

Effortful Swallow Exercise



Setup: Perform the exercise with food or drink, or with biofeedback as appropriate.

Directions: Swallow normally, but tightly squeeze your tongue and throat muscles throughout the swallow. Repeat as instructed by your therapist.

Tip: By swallowing with as much effort as possible, you can keep food from getting stuck in your throat.

Mendelsohn Maneuver



Setup: The goal of this activity is to keep the opening of your esophagus open longer by holding your larynx, or voice box, in a raised position.

Directions: Place your finger on your larynx. Swallow normally, and feel your larynx rise up during the swallow. On the next swallow, feel your larynx rise and hold it at its highest point for 3 seconds. Release and repeat as instructed by your therapist.

Tip: Practice this activity to improve your swallow and help facilitate the correct passage of food and fluid toward your stomach.

Masako Maneuver



Setup: The goal of this activity is to increase the movement of your pharyngeal, or throat, muscles.

Directions: Place your tongue between your teeth and gently bite down to hold your tongue in place. Swallow your saliva without releasing your tongue. Repeat as instructed by your therapist.

Tip: The muscles of your tongue and pharynx work together to help you swallow properly. In this activity, you create more open space in your throat when you hold your tongue between your teeth.

Chin Tuck Against Resistance (CTAR)



Setup: Begin sitting upright with a small, soft ball or rolled towel in your hand.

Directions: Place the ball or rolled towel under your chin. Squeeze the ball/towel by tucking your chin toward your chest as hard as you can. Hold briefly, then relax and repeat.

Tip: Be sure to keep your shoulders down and your chin touching the ball/towel throughout the exercise.

Expiratory Muscle Strength Training (EMST)



Setup: EMST uses a device to provide resistance during exhalation, strengthening the expiratory muscles.

Directions: When helping patients perform the exercise, gradually increase resistance and monitor for signs of respiratory distress. Use caution with patients with severe COPD or other respiratory conditions.

Tip: Beneficial for patients with reduced cough effectiveness and respiratory support for swallowing.



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Shaker Maneuver Exercise



Setup: This exercise helps improve suprahyoid muscle strength, beneficial for patients with reduced UES opening.

Directions: The Shaker exercise involves lifting the head while lying flat on the back, holding it for a set duration, and then lowering it.

Tip: You may need to gradually work up to performing the prescribed sets and repetitions for each exercise.

Tongue Pressure Resistance



Setup: Use a resistance device or press the tongue against the roof of the mouth.

Directions: Apply steady pressure, hold briefly, then relax. Repeat as directed.

Tip: Start with light resistance and increase gradually. Avoid if you have oral sensitivity or pain.

Pitch Glides



Setup: Begin sitting upright. Pitch glides involve gliding the voice from a low to a high pitch.

Directions: Produce a natural "ee" sound at a comfortable pitch. Gradually elevate to your highest pitch. Once there, exert effort to continue to produce the forceful "ee" sound. Hold the note at your highest pitch for several seconds, then rest and repeat.

Tip: Monitor for vocal strain and encourage gentle, smooth glides.

Falsetto Exercise



Setup: Ensure the patient uses a relaxed vocal technique to prevent strain.

Directions: This exercise involves sustaining a high-pitched "eee" sound, targeting the cricothyroid muscle.

Tip: Beneficial for patients with reduced laryngeal elevation and vocal fold closure. Avoid using this exercise with patients who have vocal fold pathologies or discomfort with high pitches.

Gargling



Setup: The goal of this activity is to increase the movement and strength of your tongue muscles. Begin sitting upright in a chair with your feet flat on the floor.

Directions: Pull your tongue back to your throat as if you were going to gargle. Hold for 1 second. Relax and repeat.

Tip: If you are able to gargle, do this for 1 second.

Disclaimer: This program provides exercises related to preventative maintenance OR to your condition that you can perform at home. As there is a risk of injury with any activity, use caution when performing exercises. If you experience any pain or discomfort, discontinue the exercises and contact your healthcare provider.

