



Speech and language therapy exercises

Rehabilitation and Support

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This information is for patients who are going to receive radiotherapy to their head or neck. The Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) will go through and practice the exercises you need to do.

This leaflet will explain:

- Why you need these exercises
- The aim of the exercises
- How to do the exercises

Why do I need these exercises?

Cancer in the head and neck and its treatment, can frequently cause changes to speech and swallowing. The changes and how severe they are depend on the size and position of the tumour and on the type of treatment received. Research has shown that patients who regularly carry out exercises for the jaw, tongue, lips and voice box (larynx) have better swallowing ability in the long term when compared with patients who do not do these exercises.

The aim of the exercises is to:

- Help improve/maintain the strength and mobility, of your lips, tongue, jaw and voice box which is essential for speech and swallowing
- Help maintain the flexibility of the tissues in your mouth and throat both during and after your radiotherapy

Exercises for speech and swallowing for patients having radiotherapy to the head and neck area

How to do the exercises

The Speech and Language Therapist will explain and show you how to do the exercises that are appropriate for you. Please do the exercise programme 10 times a day (if possible). It is more effective to do the exercises for a few minutes, 10 times per day rather than for a longer time, less often. The exercises may feel like hard work at times, but persevere. Please stop doing the exercises if you experience pain and request an appointment with your speech and language therapist. The side effects of radiotherapy can cause discomfort so you may find that doing the exercises more slowly may help or you may have to stop completely for a short time. It is important to restart the exercises as soon as possible and to continue for three months after your treatment has finished.

Exercises

Lips

- Spread your lips as far as possible and hold at maximum stretch for 3 seconds. Then pucker your lips as tightly as possible hold for 3 seconds. Repeat spread/pucker sequence 5 times



Jaw

- Open your mouth as wide as possible repeat 5 times
- Move your jaw in a circular motion with your mouth open as if chewing

Tongue - range of movement – repeat these exercises 5 times

- Extend your tongue straight out of your mouth as far as possible and keep it there for 3 seconds
- Pull your tongue back into your mouth as far as possible and hold for 3 seconds (as if yawning)
- Point your tongue to one side of the mouth (inside the mouth) as far as possible - hold at maximum stretch 3 seconds. Then point your tongue to the other side of your mouth as far as possible – hold for 3 seconds
- With your mouth as wide open as possible, lift the tip of your tongue up as far as possible
- With your mouth open as wide open as possible, lift the back of your tongue as high as possible (as if saying 'K')

Tongue - strength

- Press the tongue up firmly into the hard palate - keep pressing for 3 seconds release then repeat 5 times

Voice box

- Slide up the musical scale as high as possible. Hold the highest note for 3 seconds
- Say the sound 'ah' using a hard voice and repeat 5 times
- Take a breath and hold in your throat for 3 seconds and repeat 5 times

Swallow exercises

- Hold your tongue gently between your teeth and swallow hard and repeat 5 times
- Swallow hard, squeezing the tongue and walls of the throat together forcibly and repeat 5 times

Extended swallow

- Swallow your saliva (spit) paying attention to the movement of your Adam's apple as you do so - it lifts then lowers again. On the next swallow, do not let your Adam's apple drop. Work your muscles hard to stop the Adam's apple from lowering. Keep it up for five seconds and repeat three times. Try repeating whilst taking some food or liquid

If you have any problems or queries about these exercises, please ask to see the Speech & Language Therapist and an appointment will be made for you.



Contact details

Speak to any member of the healthcare team at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre involved in your care; they will arrange an appointment for you to see the Speech and Language Therapist.

Speech and Language Therapist at Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral

0151 334 1155 Ext 5791

Macmillan Cancer Information and Support at: Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral

0151 482 7722

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Aintree

0151 514 2800

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We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 482 7722.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 482 7722.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 482 7927.

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