



## Your Health Education

### Swallowing Plan During Treatment

#### If you cannot eat right now...

##### Goals:

1. Optimize and maintain swallowing function throughout treatment
2. Avoid aspiration pneumonia
3. Avoid drastic weight loss and dehydration

##### How is this done?

1. You will work with a swallowing therapist who will teach you range of motion and swallowing strengthening exercises to complete daily during treatment.
2. You will work closely with a dietitian to monitor your nutrition and help with tube feeds.
3. You should continue to swallow your saliva and, if possible, small ice chips or sips of water to keep your mouth moist, to thin mucus, and to keep your swallowing muscles strong.

##### Tips

- You will mostly likely start to notice some changes to your swallowing during week 3-4 of treatment.
- Taste will change. Try not to let this discourage you.
  - It may take up to 6 months for taste to return.
- Dry mouth is a result of radiation treatment. You may use ice chips (*as tolerated*), swish and spit water, or use moist oral swabs to help with this.
  - *Ask your doctor about products that may help with dry mouth.*
- Keep mouth clean. It is very important to brush your teeth (*use fluoride*) to protect your teeth and gums AND to reduce your risk of developing pneumonia even if you are not eating by mouth.

*The UPMC Head & Neck Cancer Survivorship Clinic will plan to see you again in 1 month following treatment. Contact the Survivorship swallowing therapist if you have questions.*