



Your Health Education

Swallowing Plan During Treatment

If you are eating or if you are restricted in what you can eat...

Goals:

1. Optimize and maintain swallowing function throughout treatment
2. Avoid food and liquids entering your lungs (*aspiration*)
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. Your therapist will be your coach during treatment and may suggest swallowing strategies or diet changes that will help you swallow safely and more easily.
 - *You should continue to eat and drink to prevent swallowing muscle loss.*
2. Your swallowing therapist will work closely with a dietitian to help you identify foods and liquids that are high in calories and safe to eat. If you have a feeding tube, you may use it to supplement your nutrition as needed. We will monitor your weight and provide suggestions as needed.
3. Drinking enough liquids will be important to avoid dehydration. Your therapist will ask how much liquid you are drinking each day and may also suggest liquids that are high in calories (Examples: Boost, Ensure)
 - **REMEMBER:** *A feeding tube is NOT a replacement for swallowing.*
 - *If you get water through a feeding tube or IV fluids, you should continue to drink water as tolerated to keep your mucus thin.*

Tips

- You will most likely start to notice some changes to your swallowing during week 3-4 of treatment.
- It is normal to make changes to what you are eating by mouth or how often you are eating.
 - *You may find it easier to eat small meals more often.*
- When swallowing becomes difficult, focus on foods that are high in calories.
 - Cream soups
 - Oatmeal- add whole milk/carnation instant breakfast
 - Add gravy to mashed potatoes
 - Alfredo sauce to pasta
 - Smoothie drinks
 - Try oral supplements (Boost or Ensure) to your daily plan
- Avoid spicy and acidic food and drink (Examples: Juices or tomato sauce). These items may hurt your throat.
- Taste will change. Try not to let this discourage you from eating and drinking.
 - *REMEMBER - Food is medicine!*
 - It may take up to 6 months for taste to return.
 - If you have a metallic taste, you may want to try using plastic silverware.
- Dry mouth is a result of radiation treatment. You may need to drink more often and take drinks during meals. Dry mouth will remain after treatment is done. Ask your doctor about products that may help with dry mouth.
- Keep mouth clean. It is important to brush your teeth (*use fluoride*) to protect your teeth and gums AND to reduce your risk of developing pneumonia.
- Once treatment is over, allow yourself at least 1 month to start feeling better.

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.