

Healthy Aging: Keeping Your Swallow Intact

Normal swallowing requires that the muscles in your mouth and throat and tongue remain flexible and that your swallow reflex remains intact. As we age, the neuromuscular system and body reflexes needed for swallowing tend to become slower. This is not much different than the impact of aging on the rest of the body. There is evidence that exercise in aging seniors can help to keep your body flexible and strong as you become older and help you to maintain function, decrease falls, etc. To keep your swallow flexible and normal as you age, it is recommended that you do each of these aerobic exercises 2-3 times a day. You might want to add them to an aerobics class if you are taking one, or do them with your friends. Each cycle should take about 5 minutes. If you experience any problems doing these exercises, contact your doctor or speech pathologist.

Muscles of the Mouth and Throat

Take a small amount of pudding into your mouth. Swallow forcefully. Squeeze the muscles hard as you swallow.

Closing the Top of the Windpipe

Take a deep breath. With your mouth closed, hold your breath for 5 seconds. Then relax.

Strengthening the Tongue

Take a wooden tongue blade (a popsicle stick or small blunt butter knife) and place it flat on your tongue. Push down with the tongue blade while pushing up with your tongue.

Range of Motion for Lips - 1

Spread your lips as far as you can horizontally (as when you are saying "ee"). Hold for 5 seconds; then relax.

Range of Motion for Lips - 2

Pucker your lips as much as you can (as when you are saying "oo"). Hold for 5 seconds; then relax.

Range of Motion for Lips - 3

Pull your lips to one side as hard as you can. Hold for a couple of seconds. Repeat by pulling your lips to the other side and holding for another couple of seconds.

Swallow Mechanism in Throat

Start to swallow. When you feel all the muscles in your throat squeezing together, then, hold tightly. Then relax.