



Exercises to encourage jaw opening and to reduce jaw pain: A guide for patients with head and neck cancer

This leaflet is for patients who have treatment for head and neck cancer and who are experiencing mouth opening difficulties. It gives exercises to help increase mouth opening and reduce jaw discomfort. Exercises should only be used by the individual named below and under guidance from your speech and language therapist.

Patient name: _____

Why do I need to do these exercises?

Surgery and radiotherapy to the head and neck can result in reduced mouth opening. This can result in difficulties eating/drinking, cleaning your teeth, having your mouth examined and difficulties placing an artificial airway (where that is necessary).

The “three fingers” test is a quick way to assess for ‘normal’ mouth opening. Placing your fingers sideways see how many you can fit between your top and bottom teeth. If you notice your mouth opening is getting worse please contact your healthcare professional which may be a speech and language therapist.

The exercises

The following exercises may help to increase mouth opening and reduce discomfort. Only complete these exercises as directed by your speech and language therapist. If you have any concerns or experience any pain when completing these exercises, STOP and contact your therapist before continuing.

Please complete the whole routine _____ per day.

Contact details:

Speech and Language Therapy Department – 0118 322 5205 / 07901 224017.

Email: rbft.headandnecksalt@nhs.net

1. Mouth open wide

- A) As if you are yawning, open your mouth wide in a comfortable stretch. There should be some resistance, but no pain.
- Hold for 7-10 seconds.
 - Perform 10 x repetitions.

2. Resisted opening of the mouth

- A) Put your thumb under your chin and push gently upwards. Then open your mouth feeling for slight resistance.
- Hold this for 3-6 seconds and then gently close it.
 - Perform 10 x repetitions.



3. Resisted closing of the mouth

- A) Using one hand, grasp your chin gently with your index finger and thumb. Close your mouth as you place gentle downwards pressure on your chin.
- Hold for 3-6 seconds.
 - Perform 10 x repetitions.



4. Forward jaw movement

- A) Move your bottom jaw forward so that your bottom teeth are in front of your top teeth. Imagine you are trying to touch your nose with your bottom teeth.
- Hold for 7-10 seconds.
 - Perform 10 x repetitions.



5. Side to side jaw movement

- A) With your mouth slightly open move the jaw from side to side.
- Hold for 7-10 seconds in each direction.
 - Perform 10 x repetitions.
 - If you experience any clicking or noise from the jaw joint STOP and discuss with your therapist.



Further information

The Christie NHS Foundation Trust have some very useful videos on their website, showing how to do some of these exercises – ask your speech and language therapist for advice if you are not sure what exercises are suitable. Visit <https://www.christie.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/services/rehabilitation-department-physiotherapy-and-occupational-therapy/what-we-do/speech-and-language-therapy/speech-and-language-therapy-exercise-videos>

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Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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