



Voice & Swallow Therapy

For Head and Neck Cancer

Rehabilitate and maintain voice & swallow function

Why do I need speech therapy?

After receiving your diagnosis, we understand that there are many specialties to be seen and appointments to be made. A speech-language pathologist (SLP) will first evaluate your diagnosis and symptoms and provide education and considerations for changes that may occur to your body after surgery. Because of the location of your cancer, we then work with you to create a plan to help keep your speech and swallow strong and mobile to support your ability to speak and eat. We also offer speech therapy to help you speak clearly after treatment if needed. For some, we help you rehabilitate your voice with voice exercises, or provide information and training for alternative communication as needed. We also offer Myofascial Release Therapy (a specific kind of massage/stretching) for head and neck that may help reduce tissue stiffness and scar tissue after treatment/surgery and is evidence-based to help improve your ability to swallow. Our SLP works together with your physician to ensure you are informed and have the tools to support your recovery before, during, and after treatment.

Why is it important I make an appointment sooner than later?

Speech therapy is often missed early on, which can be the difference for some people of whether they can swallow and/or speak weeks, months, and years after treatment. We have many patients who are seen 10+ years after undergoing radiation and surgical treatments who tell us, "I wish I knew about speech therapy years ago from the beginning!" Different patients will have different needs, but all patients can benefit from at least 1 pre-operative session to learn about changes that will occur from surgery, changes that may occur from radiation, and information and exercises to help prevent some of the lasting effects to your treatment site and give you the best outcome for maintaining and/or rehabilitating your speech and/or swallow. After your treatment, we recommend following up with regular visits as needed, based on your symptoms, for rehabilitative exercises. Periodic check-ins with an SLP may continue life-long, as some changes may continue to be progressive causing voice or swallowing symptoms later in life.

Considerations for patients who undergo laryngectomy

Big changes await you after your surgery affecting your anatomy with how you breathe, speak, and even smell. A pre-operative counseling session is critical to your preparation for these changes, you will learn how to manage your new airway, review safety considerations, and review options for alternative communication methods both short-term, directly after surgery, and long-term. Additionally, alaryngeal (meaning "without a larynx") speech rehabilitation sessions may be helpful after recovery to train you and help you adapt to your new communication method.

We look forward to working together and supporting you in your recovery and beyond!