

If Your Jaw is Tight and Stiff (Trismus): Common Problems and Helpful Hints

Information for patients

If you have had an operation which involved your jaw, biting and chewing hard textures (e.g. apple, steak, salad, pizza, tough bread crusts, toast) should be avoided for 6 weeks after your operation. This is to allow your jaw to heal. During this time, choose puréed or softer textures which are gentler to chew.

If it is painful to move your jaw, make sure that you take enough pain relief medication half-an-hour before doing your jaw exercises. Do not continue to exercise if the pain increases, or persists after exercising.

Sugar free chewing gum may be helpful to keep your jaw moving. Chewing gum that contains xylitol will help to protect your teeth from dental decay. Check with your Speech and Language Therapist that it is safe for you to chew gum.

Jaw exercises

Aim to do these exercises little and often. You will need to keep working at these exercises long term for maximum benefit.

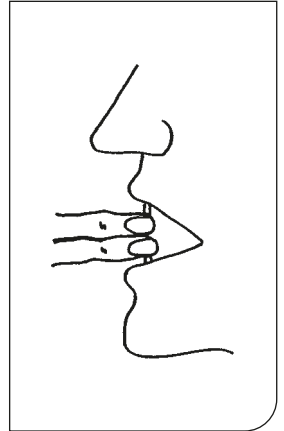
Repeat the entire sequence 7 times a day.

- 1.** Open your mouth as wide as is comfortable, then release. Repeat 7 times.
- 2.** Open your mouth wide, move your jaw to the left and then release. Repeat 5 times.
- 3.** Open your mouth wide, move your jaw to the right and then release. Repeat 5 times.

Ensure this is a gentle stretch. Do not stretch it to the point at which you feel pain. You may experience a slight ache in the jaw afterwards. If this results in pain, stop and consult your Speech and Language Therapist.

General advice

- If you find it hard to chew, try soft moist foods with plenty of sauces and gravy. Wash food down with drinks.
- If you need a fluid diet it is still important that you receive all the nourishment that your body needs. Follow your dietitian's advice and refer to our fluid diet sheet.
- A straw may be helpful for drinking.
- It is still important to keep your mouth clean. Use a small toothbrush if necessary. The Specialist Nurses can give you more advice about oral hygiene.
- A good way to check how wide you are able to open your mouth is by the 'Finger test'. Ask your Speech and Language Therapist to show you this. Aim to have a gap of at least two fingers width between your teeth – the exercises should help with this.



How to contact us / further information

If you have any questions or concerns, or need any further information, please contact your GP or call:

Head and Neck Cancer Specialist Nurses

Telephone: 01865 234 346

(Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm)

Speech and Language Therapists

Telephone: 01865 231 205

(Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm)

You will also be given the Specialist Nurses leaflet, which contains information on websites and support groups that you may find helpful.

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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