



DYSPHAGIA MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, LLC

## An Explanation of Dysphagia Complications with Cervical Spine Surgery

### Why is My Physician Recommending That I See A Speech Pathologist? I Speak Fine!

- Your physician has recommended that you be evaluated because you have, or are going to have cervical spine surgery.
- An SLP is a specialist in many areas of physical and cognitive function, including swallowing disorders, called dysphagia.
- Many times Patients with cervical spine issues experience issues related to dysphagia that we don't recognize. The function of the Speech Pathologist in this situation is to evaluate everything that is happening from your mouth, down to the point when you swallow. This involves many things such as muscles, nerves, the brain, respiratory function, and even the gastrointestinal system.
- This SLP has been trained to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and spend the necessary time with you in order to provide your physician with a clear picture of your issues. This will result in a more positive outcome for you in a more expedient manner.

### How Would A Speech Pathologist Diagnose That I Have Dysphagia?

- The SLP will gather a very thorough history by taking the necessary time to discuss your health, habits, and issues that you have been experiencing. Be sure to be open and discuss what is going on, as this is how the puzzle begins to take shape.
- You will have a thorough dysphagia diagnostic evaluation, which will include a swallowing instrumentation. This will assess the physical characteristics of your pharynx and its functional ability to do its job in the manner in which it was designed, in spite of your Parkinson's.
- The results of this thorough dysphagia evaluation will then determine what, if any, changes may help you feel better and stay healthier.
- You will have a conversation with the Speech Pathologist (SLP) to discuss the results of these tests and your specific health care needs.
- Following the comprehensive evaluation, you may expect to see the SLP for therapy sessions to incorporate the recommendations that are specific to your needs, recovery, and how to manage your situation. Dysphagia can manifest both before and after the surgery.
- The rehabilitation process may be ongoing. The hope is that you will feel much better and may be able to manage the dysphagia on your own, having been given the tools and education to do so. Rehabilitation and/or management is absolutely possible as you recover!

### Is Any of This Going To Hurt? Is It Dangerous?

- Speech Pathology Services, including instrumentation for swallowing diagnostics, are not painful and require no surgical procedures, prep time, or recovery time. You can complete this procedure sitting in your favorite chair, in your bed, or even sitting at a table.
- The evaluation techniques include looking inside your mouth, having you move the tongue, lips, and palate to check for function.
- The un-sedated and un-anesthetized instrumentation utilized in this program is the Fiber-optic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing, or FEES as performed by an SLP. This involves sliding a little spaghetti-sized endoscope along the floor of the nose to peek behind your uvula (that thing that jiggles when you say 'ah'), evaluating the function of the throat, and watching what happens when you eat or drink certain foods or liquids. It is not painful and feels like you are picking your nose and lasts only a few minutes.
- These instrumentations have been performed since 1992, and SLPs have performed hundreds of thousands of these without incident. They are very safe, and the literature states that their specificity is of great benefit to the patient to effectively manage dysphagia.

### Are Speech Pathology Services Expensive? Will My Insurance Cover It?

- Speech therapy is covered by Medicare, Managed Care, and most insurance policies. When your appointment is scheduled with DMS, for example, we will ask for your insurance information, and if a pre-approval is necessary, we will be provided with necessary information.
- There may or may not be a co-pay according to your insurance plan, identical to how your regular speech therapy is handled.
- If necessary, Speech Therapy will provide you with the information and tools that you need in order to manage this issue by yourself. This is a great investment and is much less expensive than repeat medical episodes, hospitalizations, or additional tests.
- The goal of this program is to provide cost-effective, state of the art, coordinated care with your Physician and/or Facility professionals.

### What Can I Expect From This Process?

- You can expect to be provided with the individualize attention necessary to identify the issues you are experiencing, diagnose the functional capabilities of your oral and pharyngeal mechanisms, and have the facility SLP guide you through the process.
- You can expect to be listened-to intently, heard resoundingly, and feel comfortable in sharing those aspects of how you feel that have perhaps never-before been correlated with the issues you are experiencing.
- You can expect to receive professional care in a setting that allows for a coordination of care between these professionals, all meant to result in a quicker, more effective positive outcome for you!
- You can expect to learn what is wrong, why it is happening, and how you can manage these issues.
- You can expect to be in charge of your ongoing success, having been given the tools to do so by the professionals in this facility.
- You can expect to feel better and have a more functional swallow with your dysphagia better managed.

### Where Can I Find Out More About Your Team of SLPs?

- Go to [www.DysphagiaManagement.com](http://www.DysphagiaManagement.com) to learn more about our team of specialists or check our Patient Services on SwallowSafe.com.
- If you have more questions, please feel free to call our offices at 855-693-7822 and they will put you in touch with your local specialist who will be happy to answer your questions.



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### Do I Have Dysphagia For Sure If I Have Issues With My Cervical Spine Before or After Surgery?

- Postoperatively, 71% of patient having cervical spine surgery reported dysphagia (trouble swallowing) at their 2-week follow-up. It is vital that the patient understands the risks during recovery in order to avoid the complications that coughing, choking, and aspiration of food or liquid can cause during this period of time.
- Dysphagia is one of the most common complications following cervical spinal surgery. The Five Systems of Dysphagia can be managed!
- The presence of dysphagia prior to the surgery can intensify the swallowing difficulties following surgery and should be managed.
- The dysphagia complications can last for weeks, months or even longer. Safety and management is the key to optimal recovery!
- Studies show that up to 30% of surgery patients have some degree of dysphagia that lasts up to 2 yrs after surgery without treatment.

### Can You Explain More About These Five Systems of Dysphagia and How They Really Affect Me?

- **The Neurological System** is the most common system to be affected following cervical spine surgery.
  - Identification of dysphagia prior to surgery can help the patient stay strong with reduced risk during recovery as well as help the patient begin the rehabilitative path toward regaining their swallowing safety.
  - Because of the nature of the surgery and its proximity to the muscles and nerves involved in swallowing, the surgery itself insults the entire area responsible for swallowing. This is normal and can resolve with proper care and attention.
  - Operationalizing your dysphagia management needs at home is a vital step in this process since the swallow will be affected immediately following the surgery.
- **The Gastrointestinal System** has a high prevalence of dysfunction both before and following cervical spine surgery.
  - Effective diagnosis includes identification of the risk of gastro-esophageal reflux of stomach contents into the airway.
  - According to the literature, this type of surgery insults the GI tract which can result in significant, perhaps temporary issues.
  - Medications following surgery can often have a side effect of increased GERD symptoms which can be managed.
  - Managing GERD following surgery can reduce chronic cough, respiratory complications, voice issues, and failure to thrive.
  - Identifying which foods and liquids increase/decrease the GERD can significantly improve quality of life during recovery.
- **The Muscular System** of swallowing may be one of the first signs of cervical issues although the Patient may not recognize the effects.
  - Swallowing safely requires a ballet of coordinated movements, working in synchrony to pass through the pharynx. For example, the epiglottis must close over the closed vocal cords, to protect the airway as the food and liquid passes to the esophagus.
  - Muscle weakness, rigidity, dis-coordination and fatigue all add risk to the swallowing process following surgery.
  - Literature and retrospective review confirm that medications following surgery can affect the effort and coordination required for safe swallowing.. Timing of medications-to-eating is essential to figure out the safest window of risk.
  - A thorough diagnostic and risk evaluation helps determine compensatory strategies that increase safety and reduce risk.
  - Identifying the textures of foods and liquids that are best handled throughout the entire meal, and day, are part of the evaluation.
- **The Cognitive System** can be affected because of anesthesia and medications following surgery, but may be difficult to recognize.
  - Because of these effects, reasoning and judgment may vary with distraction, exertion, depression, and overall fatigue. In addition, swallowing comes from the central command area in the brain and these signals may be diminished both before and after surgery.
  - Retrospective data and literature reviews discuss the effects of medications on reasoning and judgment, along with the differences in tolerance between men and women. A thorough evaluation provides vital baseline data to assist in safety and recovery.
  - Identifying the ability to make good decisions and understand the risks of certain foods and liquids, and remember specialized techniques that are vital to maintain good health and quality of life, are part of the post-operative process.
- **The Respiratory System** is affected by having an intense surgery such as this, and should be managed carefully for optimum health.
  - Literature places respiratory issues as the top health concern, and cautions that GERD and Aspiration prevention are key.
  - The coordination of the vocal cord closing, epiglottis retroversion, squeezing of the pharynx, and opening of the upper esophageal sphincter, to push the food and liquid through to the esophagus ideally happens in just a few seconds.
  - The patient has to hold their breath for this list of coordinated movements to be completed safely, hundreds of times in a meal.
  - The gastro-esophageal reflux, if present, has to stay out of the airway as it comes back up into the pharynx during this process.
  - A thorough evaluation of the respiratory system and the ability of the Patient to protect the airway with varying consistencies of foods, is vital to establishing safety techniques that work to increase safety and manage the dysphagia.

### Why Should I Worry About Dysphagia With my Cervical Spine Surgery Scheduled?

- It isn't about 'worrying about dysphagia', rather it is about finding out where you are right now, what you can do to be safer, and letting the professionals help so you 'don't have to worry'. DMS is committed to helping you learn how to live a more complication-free life!
- Cervical spinal surgery is very complicated and your Speech Pathologist specializes in how to keep you safe until your surgery, how to get through those post-surgery weeks without issues, and how to build up your strength and recover as fully as possible as you are ready.
- Knowledge is power, and with the comprehensive diagnostics that DMS has developed, we are empowering the Facility, Staff, Home Care Providers, Families, and Patients themselves to take control of their care. Improve your comfort, care and quality of life with DMS!