“Swallow Fit: Buffering swallowing decline in Parkinson’s Disease (PD)”
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Abstract

Over 80% of persons with PD will have trouble swallowing (dysphagia) during the life of their disease. Dysphagia in PD is significant and can have devastating impacts and reduce quality of life. Moreover, aspiration pneumonia resulting from dysphagia occurs at a disproportionally higher rate in persons with PD. As medical approaches for PD have little impact on swallowing function, behavioral rehabilitation is the standard of care for PD-related dysphagia. Unfortunately, while dysphagia is present early in PD, it is often underrecognized, and intervention typically delayed until after a patient displays obvious issues. Currently most interventions for dysphagia in PD include only compensatory approaches (food and fluid modifications, positioning, maneuvers) designed to act as transitory adjustments maximizing safety over function. This represents a lost opportunity to build strength and capacity in the swallowing system to buffer decline!

Swallow fit is a program of intense exercise-motor re-organization to build physiologic swallow capacity in PD. It has been founded in data supporting the application of physical exercise as a potent defense and built from an NIH-tested intervention for swallow rebuilding trialed in stroke and head neck cancer. While data supporting the benefits of general exercise are known, it remains unclear if exercise-based swallow treatments can buffer swallowing deficits in PD. This presentation will present and discuss the UTHSCSA swallow fit program and the study evaluating its effect patient with PD.