

Myasthenia Gravis:

Tips for Speaking and Swallowing

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

- what myasthenia gravis is
- tips for helping you swallow
- tips for helping you speak

What is myasthenia gravis?

Myasthenia Gravis is a disease that causes you to have difficulty sending messages through your nerves to your muscles. Usually, your muscles will get weak or get tired with activity but improve with rest.

Here are some tips to help you swallow and/or speak if you have myasthenia gravis. Follow the suggestions your speech language pathologist or your doctor give you.



Tips for swallowing

- If your doctor has prescribed a medicine called Mestinon, eat 30 to 45 minutes after taking it.
- Rest before meals and avoid talking.
- Watch for difficulty when eating including: coughing, clearing your throat, food sticking in your throat.
- Stop and take a rest break if you notice more difficulty when eating. Try eating later when you feel well rested.
- Try eating six smaller meals during the day if eating 3 full meals is tiring.
- Swallow or take a sip of liquid to help clear food if you feel it sticking in your mouth or throat. Cough up any food if you need to.
- Avoid chewing gum. This can tire your muscles for swallowing.
- You may need to change food textures (how the food feels in your mouth) if you have difficulty swallowing. You may need to eat:
 - Pureed (blended) foods
 - Minced (finely chopped) foods

Food with two textures (for example: cereal and milk or some soups) needs more swallowing control. They may be harder to eat. If you have difficulty with these mixed foods try:

- eating textures separately
For example, when eating cereal:
 1. drain milk from spoon
 2. eat the cereal
 3. follow with milk on the second spoonful
- blending soups
- changing your meal
- For example, eat cereal with yoghurt instead of milk. Yoghurt is thicker and easier to control.

- Eat food from all food groups even if you are changing your food textures. For example, don't avoid meat because it is difficult to chew. Finely chop or blend the meat. You will have to do less chewing to eat it.
- Watch your weight and tell your doctor if you lose 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms) or more.
- Be aware of changes in your swallowing. If the above tips don't help, ask for a swallowing assessment by a Speech-Language Pathologist.

- **See your doctor right away if:**
 - **you get a chest infection**
 - **a fever**
 - **your medical condition gets worse**

Tips for speaking

- Take lots of breaks to listen when speaking to people. This will give you a chance to rest.
- Schedule important talks when you are more rested (usually in the morning).
- Divide up the times you need to speak during the day. This will allow you to rest in between.
- Schedule important talks 30 to 45 minutes after taking your medicines.
- Try to speak in a quiet room so that you use less effort when you need to speak.
- Stand or sit closer to the person you are speaking to. You will use less effort than if you speak or shout to someone across a room.



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