

# Information for Health Practitioners

Speech-language pathologists provide assessment and treatment in the areas of communication and oropharyngeal dysphagia. A [referral](#) can be made to the LHSC Speech-Language Pathology Service during a patient's admission, or as an outpatient by a member of LHSC's Professional Staff (medical, midwifery, or extended class nursing).

## Communication Assessment

The purpose of a communication assessment is to identify the presence and nature of a speech, language, or voice impairment, evaluate prognosis, and determine the appropriate management plan. Both standardized and non-standardized assessments may be used. Medical conditions that can be frequently associated with communication disorders are: stroke, traumatic brain injury, head and neck cancer, neurological disorders, dementia, etc.

### Assessment may include evaluation of:

- Oral Expression
  - Auditory Comprehension
  - Writing
  - Reading
  - Oral motor strength and movement
- Cognition Communication
- Voice and resonance

## Dysphagia

### Clinical Swallowing Assessment

A physician may recommend a speech-language pathology assessment if any of the following signs are present:

- Coughing/throat clearing immediately after swallowing
- Wet or gurgly sounding vocal quality
- Sensation of food “sticking” in the throat
- Shortness of breath while eating
- Concerns of aspiration pneumonia

### What is involved in a clinical swallowing assessment?

During the clinical swallowing assessment, the speech-language pathologist will:

- Complete a swallowing/medical history
- Examine the muscles of the face, mouth and throat
- Present the patient with solids and liquids of varying textures to evaluate
- Make recommendations to increase the safety of swallowing
- The speech-language pathologist may also recommend an instrumental such as a Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallow Study (FEES) or a Modified Barium Swallow Study (MBS) to further evaluate the patient's swallowing

## **Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES) Study**

[A FEES study](#) utilizes an endoscope which is inserted transnasally into the pharynx and captures the patient's swallow function while eating and drinking a variety of textures.

### **What are the risks?**

Patients may experience discomfort or some bleeding when the scope is inserted into their nasal cavity. However, a topical anesthetic can be utilized in the nose prior to scope insertion to increase comfort.

### **What are the contraindications for nasoendoscopy?**

Some of the contraindications include:

- Cardiac disorders (i.e. vasoconstriction, elevated heart rate),
- Changes in respiration rate in patients with known cardiac symptoms
- History of vasovagal episodes
- Severe bleeding disorders/epistaxis
- History of methheoglobinemia,
- Recent nasal trauma
- Bilateral nasal obstructions.

The presence of these may not preclude a patient from having this assessment; however, this should be taken into consideration by the referring physician.

### **What are the benefits?**

This test can directly visualize penetration/aspiration of solids and liquids while the patient is eating or drinking. The test may also determine if texture modification or strategies will increase safety with oral intake.

## **Modified Barium Swallow (MBS) Study**

An MBS study utilizes videoflouroscopy to evaluate swallow function as a patient trials a variety of solids and liquids. Some LHSC Speech-Language Pathologists have been trained in the standardized MBSImp protocol.

### **What are the risks?**

Radiation exposure is kept at a minimum during the assessment. There is also the possibility of aspiration of barium if the patient does have swallowing difficulties.

### **What are the benefits?**

This test can directly visualize penetration/aspiration of solids and liquids while the patient is eating or drinking. The test may also determine if texture modification or strategies will increase safety with oral intake.

### **What happens after a FEES or MBS assessment is completed?**

The speech-language pathologist will discuss the results of the assessment with the patient and family. Education will be provided regarding preparation of a modified diet, if necessary. In addition, safe swallowing maneuvers and/or exercises may be recommended.

If a follow-up visit is necessary, the speech-language pathologist will arrange it with the patient directly.