The Value of Prophylactic Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) Services in the Treatment of Head and Neck Cancer

Head and neck cancer treatments can have long-lasting impacts on swallowing. Prehabilitative SLP services can lessen side effects and improve functional outcomes.

SLP interdisciplinary care prior to cancer treatment leads to . . .

**Decreased costs and fewer adverse events**
- $18,754 reduction in individual healthcare costs.¹
- 30% less likely to have unplanned re-admissions.²
- 76% less likely to have re-admissions related to stomal or tracheoesophageal puncture complications.²
- 61% less likely to experience postoperative complications.¹
- 40% reduction in overall mortality risk.³

**Increased knowledge, preparedness, and treatment adherence**
- 80%–91% of individuals undergoing total laryngectomy improved knowledge and preparedness for surgery.²
- Patients were approximately 13 times more likely to adhere to SLP treatment recommendations.⁴

**Proactive SLP treatment and assessment leads to . . .**

**Decreased feeding tube dependency**
- 32%–96% less likely to require a feeding tube at completion of treatment.⁶⁻⁹
- 70%–81% less likely to have a feeding tube at 3-6 months following cancer treatment.¹⁰,¹¹
- Feeding tube removal 12.1–15.6 weeks sooner.¹²,¹³

**Improved swallow function and oral intake**
- 4.2 times more likely to improve swallowing efficiency.⁵
- 36% more likely to achieve a functional swallow.⁹
- 2.9–4.4 times more likely to eat a solid oral diet.⁸,¹⁰,¹⁴
- 3.6 times more likely to maintain improvements in oral diet.¹⁰

The earlier, the better

When speech-language pathologists intervene prior to the initiation of cancer treatment, patients are able to resume oral diets and eliminate feeding tubes 11.4 days sooner than those seen after the start of cancer treatment.⁵

Additional benefits of prehabilitative SLP treatment . . .

- 25% less likely to miss radiation sessions.¹⁵
- Improved Swallowing-Related Quality of Life¹⁶,¹⁷
- Improved Saliva Production, Smell, and Taste⁸
- Maintained Weight¹⁵

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References


