

# Using Lolly Sticks to Help Keep Your Mouth Opening and Swallowing



**Important:** This guide is for **supportive, self-care only**.

**Always ask your healthcare professional team before starting or changing any exercises.**

## Why this matters

Treatment for **head & neck cancer** (surgery and/or radtherapy) can cause the jaw muscles to tighten over time. This can make:

- Opening your mouth harder
- Eating and swallowing more difficult
- Dental care and speech harder

**Regular gentle stretching** can help **maintain mouth opening, support swallowing**, and may reduce the risk of needing a feeding tube.

## What you need

- Flat wooden lolly (lollipop) sticks
- A quiet, comfortable place
- A few minutes, several times a day



## Step 1: Find your baseline (your starting point)

- Insert the same number of lolly sticks
- Hold the stretch for **20–30 seconds**
- Breathe normally
- Remove the sticks and rest briefly.
- Repeat **2-3 times**



✓ A gentle stretching feeling is OK

✗ **Sharp pain is not** – stop if this happens

## Step 1: Find your baseline (your starting point)

- Insert the same number of lolly sticks
- Hold the stretch for **20–30 seconds**
- Breathe normally
- Remove the sticks and rest briefly
- Repeat **2-3 times**



✓ A gentle stretching feeling is OK

✗ **Sharp pain is not** – stop if this happens

## Step 4: Track your progress

- Keep a simple daily note of how many sticks you manage:
- Over time:
  - Adding one stick
  - ≈ Improvement:
  - Staying the same during treatment = success.



✗ **Losing sticks** – early warning sign –

## Why this helps swallowing

- Maintaining mouth opening supports:
- Chewing and oral intake:
- Saliva and swallowing movements

**Disclaimer:** Always ask your health professional team before carrying out this exercise.

This guidance *does not replace advice from your clinical team: Speech & Language Therapist, or dentist.*

• [www.theswallows.org.uk](http://www.theswallows.org.uk)   

24/7 Text Support; 07830 929 400

24/7 Text Support; 07504 725059

[www.theswallows.org.uk](http://www.theswallows.org.uk)