



Frequently Asked Questions about Trismus and Therapy

What is trismus?

Trismus is a disorder of the jaw that reduces a person's ability to open his or her mouth enough to chew effectively and/or speak clearly.

What causes trismus?

Trismus can be caused by oral surgery, oral radiation, or tightness in the jaw as a result of an injury or disease.

How can speech therapy help my trismus?

Your speech therapist can recommend and provide training in various jaw-stretching exercises to increase your mouth opening for you to eat the kinds of foods you like, maintain adequate nutrition, speak clearly, reduce jaw discomfort and tightness, improve your ability to perform proper oral hygiene care for healthy dentition, and reduce your risk of contracting aspiration pneumonia.

What can I do to improve my trismus?

Your speech therapist will provide you with suggestions on daily exercises you can do when you are not in therapy. It is also important that you consult with your doctor about ways you can manage your jaw pain so that you can successfully participate in therapy. Attending treatment sessions is a crucial part of jaw rehabilitation.

How long will it take for my trismus to go away?

Much of your success depends on your commitment to your exercises. Some patients require a couple of weeks of therapy while other patients require a couple of months of therapy, depending on trismus severity and cause of your trismus. Most patients who have received oral radiation need to perform daily, frequent jaw-stretching exercises

to prevent worsening of their trismus for the rest of their lives. Regardless of your number of therapy sessions, your speech therapist will provide you with and train you in using a home treatment plan so that you can continue to reduce your trismus.

How can my loved ones help me with my trismus therapy?

Caregivers can encourage you to perform your frequent, daily jaw–stretching exercises, help you record your maximal jaw opening measurements, time you during repetitions, keep track of your exercise sets, check for proper jaw–stretching device placements, check your mouth for signs of problems such as oral sores, and be your moral support to reach your therapy goals. Your speech therapist will provide training to both you and your caregiver(s).

What else would help me recover from trismus?

If you have had oral radiation or surgery, a physical therapist may be able to improve your neck and shoulder range of motion and pain. Swelling can be managed by a lymphedema therapist. Frequent dental checkups are important in maintaining oral health when you are unable to perform adequate oral hygiene tasks such as brushing and flossing your teeth. Ask your ENT for referrals to these kinds of specialists to assist in improving your quality of life and health.