

《Invited Lecture》

Strategies to treat Swallowing Disorders and Dysphagia*¹Arthur J MILLER, PhD*² and Koichiro MATSUO, DDS, PhD*³

Introduction

Treatment of dysphagia can use several mechanisms including increasing sensory input relevant to inducing swallowing, enhancing the regions of the central nervous system not damaged, and strengthening the motor system including increasing the use of the muscles active in swallowing.

Sensory System

The sensory system can be used in a strategy to treat a patient with dysphagia, and can involve increasing the intensity or frequency of stimulation of the sensory pathway, pairing multiple sensory stimulus sites, or pairing peripheral sensory stimulation with central cortical stimulation. These approaches are designed to improve or lower the threshold to trigger a pharyngeal swallow, which is an “all or none” reflex. Enhanced sensory stimulation can be from the oral and pharyngeal regions innervated by the trigeminal, glossopharyngeal, and vagal nerves¹⁻⁷⁾ (Table). Multiple-site stimulation can involve scenarios like stimulating the glossopharyngeal nerve⁸⁻¹¹⁾ or its mucosal receptive field with airpuffs during and prior to stimulating the internal branch of the superior laryngeal

nerve (iSLN) receptive fields with drops of water or sour fluid. Using surface skin electrical stimulation of the iSLN has not been shown to work to induce swallowing, but the mechanism may need further refinements using other stimulation approaches (*i.e.*, transmagnetic stimulation coils).

Experimental studies in the anesthetized adult cat show that rubbing and touching the anterior faucial pillars with a probe that is at ambient or cold temperatures does not induce swallowing.¹²⁾ However, simultaneously probing the anterior faucial pillars while stimulating the iSLN evokes more pharyngeal swallowing than with iSLN stimulation alone. These data suggest that the thermal stimulation to the pillars excite trigeminal sensory fibers innervating this region, which, somehow and through a longer synaptic loop, facilitate the interneurons in the nucleus tractus solitarius (NTS) of the brain stem, triggering pharyngeal swallowing. In humans, administering air pulses uni- or bilaterally to the peritonsillar area evokes an irrepressible urge to swallow, followed by a pharyngeal swallow.¹³⁾ Based on many different sensory studies of swallowing, an ideal stimulus could be a complex stimulus involving a moving, highly patterned and textured object that would disintegrate to a flu-

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Table Potential factors involved with rehabilitation in patients with dysphagia

		References
Sensory systems		
Nerves	Trigeminal	Sweazey and Bradley, 1989 ⁵⁾
	Glossopharyngeal	Kitagawa et al, 2002 ¹¹⁾
	Internal branch of the superior laryngeal nerve	Sinclair, 1970, 1971 ^{8,9)}
Stimuli	Airpuffs	Theurer et al, 2005 ¹³⁾
	Water	Sweazey and Bradley, 1988 ⁴⁾
	Sour taste	Logemann et al, 1995 ¹⁴⁾
	Touch/pressure	Capra, 1995 ¹⁾
	Cold	Chi-Fishman et al, 1994 ¹²⁾
	Electrical stimulation applied directly to the faucial pillars	Power et al, 2004 ²⁹⁾
Sites	Anterior faucial pillars	Chi-Fishman et al, 1994 ¹²⁾
	Peritonsillar area	Power et al, 2004 ²⁹⁾
	Pharyngeal mucosa	Sinclair, 1970, 1971 ^{8,9)}
Central nervous system		
Stimuli	Excitatory amino acids and norepinephrine injected into the brain stem	Bieger, 1981, 1998 ^{18,19)}
	Transcranial magnetic stimulation applied near the sensorimotor cortex region	Hamdy et al, 1999, 2000 ^{40,41)}
Sites	Brain stem	Jean, 1990 ¹⁵⁾
	Nucleus tractus solitarius	Jean and Tell, 1994 ¹⁷⁾
Motor pathway		
Stimulation	Placing bipolar stimulating electrodes in selected muscles like the geniohyoid and stimulating at near tetanic contraction levels	Mann et al, 2002 ³²⁾ Burnett et al, 2005 ³⁴⁾
Exercises	Use muscles involved in swallowing in vocalization exercises	Fox et al, 2006 ²⁶⁾
	Strengthen muscles through tongue exercises	Robbins et al, 2005 ²⁷⁾

id-like substance that includes a weak acid. Taste is an effective stimulus and sour substances have some affects to evoke swallowing.¹⁴⁾

Central Nervous System

The brain stem pathway for swallowing develops early, and in the prenatal period, well before cortical descending input becomes important. The brain stem central pathway controlling pharyngeal swallowing is almost like an imprinted neural circuit, which develops further postnatally. The major changes postnatally are that the cortex and higher central nervous system (CNS) regions become more important to modulating and affecting the threshold to induce swallowing and its intensity. The primary site for controlling the pharyngeal phase of swallowing is the nucleus tractus solitarius.^{15, 16)} Potentially, the NTS subnuclei could be altered by direct application of neural transmitters

and growth factors as well as administering inhibitors to enzymes that degrade the neural transmitters.¹⁷⁻¹⁹⁾ Injecting norepinephrine directly into the NTS in an experimental animal induces pharyngeal swallowing. The potential for microinjections of drugs into discrete regions of the brain, or specific arteries as with the vertebral blood supply, raise interesting questions on potential methods to induce swallowing. Ideally, a short-term application of a neurotransmitter, which would facilitate the brain stem swallowing pathway for a brief period without side effects, would be the most valuable approach.¹⁹⁻²¹⁾ Even the placement of a long-term (*i.e.*, 2-3 month) biodegradable source of the neurotransmitter placed directly over the dorsal medullary region of the brain stem might prove valuable in rehabilitation.²²⁾ Among excitatory amino acid neural transmitters, glutamate can evoke a complete swallow or components of its response.^{23,24)}

Motor Pathway

We can also alter the motor pathway as a method to improve swallowing in a patient with dysphagia. We can strengthen the motor output either by enhancing the synaptic drive to the motoneurons in a motoneuron pool that innervates a given muscle and/or strengthen the muscles innervated by the motoneuron pool. Muscles used in swallowing can be strengthened by exercises. The Lee Silverman Voice Treatment (LSVT) exercise has been shown to improve swallowing by its approach of improving vocal intensity and using a vocal exercise.²⁵⁾ The oral transit time, the pharyngeal transit time, and vallecular residue decreased in Parkinson's patients who completed one month of the Lee Silverman Voice Treatment.²⁶⁾ Tongue strength as well as swallowing improved with Parkinson's patients using the LSVT approach. Placing a subject on tongue exercises against resistance which involves applying pressure to a balloon-like object increases the strength and mass of tongue muscles, and as a result of this non-swallowing exercise, improves swallowing pressures on liquid boluses and reduces the penetration aspiration scores.²⁷⁾ Exercises are effective in assisting the upper esophageal sphincter to open as the exercises strengthen the muscles that assist this opening, and the exercise develops a better biomechanical approach.²⁸⁾ These exercises mean that a motoneuron is trained in one type of motor response that is not swallowing, but is more responsive during swallowing because its muscle fibers are stronger. But it is possible that just increased use of this motoneuron and the muscle fibers it innervates (*i.e.*, motor unit) enhance the central synaptic drive on this motoneuron. In addition, the type of use of the motor unit will modify the properties of its muscle fibers. Increasing the frequency of motoneuron use will enhance the blood supply to its muscle fibers and make them more fatigue resistant. Increasing force of contraction of the motor unit against a greater load will enhance the muscle fibers to develop greater cross-sectional area and, resultantly, more force.

Electrical Stimulation

Electrical stimulation has proved to be one form of modulating the swallowing pathway. Applying electrical stimulation to the human faucial pillars for 10 minutes in normal subjects at different frequencies did not necessarily induce swallowing but did modify the evoked potential in pharyngeal muscles induced by transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) applied to the sensorimotor cortex.²⁹⁾ Bipolar surface electrode stimulation overlying the submental and laryngeal regions were tested as to its effect on laryngeal and hyoid descent in ten normal subjects.³⁰⁾ Applying the same stimulation during pharyngeal swallowing reduced the larynx and hyoid bone peak elevation with the swallows, and was judged less safe based on the National Institutes of Health-Swallowing Safety Scale.³¹⁾ Inserting fine wires directly into the genioglossus muscle and stimulating through these bipolar hooked electrodes resulted in a significant increase in the hypopharyngeal airway.³²⁾ Placing monopolar hooked wires into the mylohyoid, thyrohyoid, and geniohyoid muscles in normal subjects produced significantly greater elevation of the larynx, and has real potential to assist subjects with dysphagia who cannot elevate their larynx during a normal pharyngeal swallow.^{33,34)}

Electrical stimulation applied longitudinally to striated muscles can also have a direct impact on strengthening the muscles as shown in animal studies. A denervated muscle in an experimental animal can be maintained without losing muscle mass by stimulating the muscle with high frequency (*i.e.*, 100 Hz) to obtain a near tetani-like contractions for short bursts (20 pulses) at a high intensity to obtain a near 90 % of maximum isometric tetanic contraction, and repeating this often over a 24 hour period (*i.e.*, 200 contractions in 24 hours).^{35,36)}

Cortex

Functional magnetic resonance imaging has shown that multiple sites of the cortex are active during swallowing and vary slightly as to whether it is a spontaneous swallow or voluntarily elicited.³⁷⁻⁴⁰⁾

Other approaches have identified similar sites.⁴¹⁾ Studies in the awake primate, using intracranial microelectrode stimulation, demonstrate that swallowing can be elicited in an area lateral to the primary motor cortical face area (MI) and the primary sensory cortical face area (SI), as well as an area immediately lateral and/or anterior to the face MI.⁴²⁾ This same region may receive mechanical sensory input from sensory stimulation in the oral cavity including the tongue contacting other oral tissue as well as a bolus. Swallowing impairment is more common with bilateral hemispheric strokes, but can also occur with a unilateral infarction of either hemisphere.⁴³⁾ These results suggest that one side of the cortex plays a dominant role, and that role would include more control over the initiation and intensity of the swallow.

Relearning in a damaged brain as with swallowing in a patient following a stroke, requires the brain to reorganize to restore function. The brain continuously remodels its circuitry in order to learn in the normal state, and those properties apply to the undamaged portion of the brain in a subject with a CNS stroke.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁸⁾ After focal ischemic infarct in a rat or monkey cortex, the adjacent undamaged cortex needs to become more active.^{49,50)} Retraining of skilled hand or limb use results in prevention of loss of hand or limb territory adjacent to the infarct of the cortex with the permanent damage. Rehabilitative training in skilled reaching tasks with a limb can prevent the adjacent cortical regions from losing function and can reorganize their neurons.⁵¹⁾ Such training must involve repetition to induce and maintain the neural plasticity. Rehabilitative training can shape subsequent reorganization of the adjacent intact cortex so that undamaged motor cortex may play an important role in motor recovery.^{52,53)}

Rehabilitation after a cortical stroke inducing dysphagia may be assisted by increasing the use of a second pathway (*i.e.*, another sensory input) to compensate for the loss of the descending pathway from the cortex, which could normally be facilitatory. Consistent stimulation with several trials daily over a period of days to weeks would be expected to improve the swallowing pathway. It could be pos-

tulated that increased attempts to elicit pharyngeal swallowing in a patient with a cortical stroke would use alternate, undamaged cortical sites, and that enhancing the sensory input to these undamaged sites without evoking swallowing would lead to these cortical regions incorporating neurons around the site of damage, or with the contralateral cortical region which would have a similar function.^{54,55)}

Transcranial magnetic stimulation can be applied to the pharynx to induce cortical evoked potentials in the sensorimotor cortex.^{55,56)} Peripheral stimulation of the pharynx will increase the cortical representation and improves swallowing in patients with strokes. In these studies, the pharyngeal mucosa was stimulated for 10 minutes at 10-Hz with bipolar ring electrodes placed in an intraluminal catheter. The authors felt that the pharyngeal stimulation for 10 minutes enhanced the cortex excitability and not the brain stem because the pharyngeal stimulation for 10 minutes did not enhance reflexes elicited from stimulating the sensory nerves that would go through the brain stem swallowing pathway. Transcranial magnetic stimulation can excite peripheral nerves.⁵⁶⁾ Trigeminal and vagal nerve stimulation occurred with a 50-mm outer diameter figure-eight coil placed over the face for the trigeminal nerve, and over the neck for the vagus nerve, 2-cm below the angle of the jaw at the anterior border of the sternocleidomastoid muscle. This type of electrode stimulates a region around 2-cm². The trigeminal nerve is stimulated by putting the center of the electrode over the supraorbital branch of the trigeminal nerve and induces a bilateral blink reflex. Stimulation to the peripheral nerves is often given at the maximum tolerated intensity. However, the most effective transcranial magnetic stimulation may be with the cortex.⁵⁷⁾ Rehabilitation of swallowing might work in which the cortex is stimulated simultaneously with the new oral or pharyngeal stimulus. Transcranial magnetic stimulation and electrical stimulation can enhance skill training when applied to the motor cortex, and when applied to the affected hemisphere of a subject with unilateral stroke, improving motor function for a

period of time.^{58,59)} Transcranial magnetic stimulation to the motor cortex can increase its excitability as has been done with training on fine digit movement.⁶⁰⁻⁶²⁾ Pairing peripheral nerve stimulation with transcranial magnetic stimulation of the cortex for a muscle of the limb will enhance the cortical stimulation in the future in recruiting that muscle.⁶³⁾ The same approach could conceivably be used with the cortex regions important to swallowing in dysphagic patients. Hamdy and his group of researchers have felt that when a unilateral cortical lesion affects the dominant swallowing cortical hemisphere, recovery includes an expansion of cortical swallowing areas in the non-damaged hemisphere.⁶⁴⁾

Summary

So many of the approaches used to rehabilitate patients with sensory and motor diseases can be effective in potentially treating dysphagic patients. Many of the strategies need to be designed to address an impaired central nervous system in which the remaining intact CNS develops new neural connections.

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