

UNIT 5

Swallowing difficulties



a Look at the two pictures. Try to guess whether these statements are True (T) or False (F).

- 1 The device is used to test the blood pressure of the arteries in the neck.
- 2 The device is used to help patients who have difficulty swallowing.
- 3 The electrodes are put over the shoulder muscles.
- 4 The electrodes are placed on either side of the neck.

b Now read the text about *VitalStim* to answer these questions. Are these statements True (T) or False (F)?

- 1 What is the name of the muscles in the mouth and throat that help in the swallowing process?
- 2 What does the patient have to do while wearing the device?
- 3 Who has used the device?
- 4 What are some of the benefits of the device?

VitalStim is a small device which is placed over the oropharyngeal muscles to help the muscles in the mouth and neck to work more efficiently. These muscles are important in the swallowing process. The device is easy to use. Electrodes are placed on the throat and/or the face to stimulate the muscles of swallowing. Patients eat and perform various therapeutic exercises during the 45- to 60-minute sessions. VitalStim strengthens the muscles used for swallowing but it is important that patients continue to use those muscles every time they eat or drink.

VitalStim Therapy has been used by Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) in the USA since 2003 with good results. The SLTs report that patients are able to swallow more easily and also report the numbers of patients requiring tube feeding has decreased. This has meant that patients are discharged from rehabilitation and can return home faster.

C Match the benefits of the device 1–5 with the word or phrase that describes them a–e.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1 the device can be carried around easily | a comfortable |
| 2 the device is not difficult to use | b fewer tube feeds |
| 3 the therapy is not unpleasant | c less hospitalisation |
| 4 decreases need for tube feeding | d portable |
| 5 more rapid discharge from rehab | e user-friendly |

d Put the sentences below in order. In pairs, role-play the dialogue between a nurse and a patient who has swallowing problems. The nurse should explain how VitalStim Therapy helps the patient to swallow more easily.

- ☐ Your neck muscles will become stronger with this therapy.
- ☐ The electrodes will stimulate the muscles which help you swallow.
- ☐ She'll put two electrodes on each side of your neck.
- ☒ The Speech and Language Therapist is going to start the VitalStim Therapy soon.
- ☐ You must remember to keep using the muscles in your neck every time you eat or drink.
- ☐ The Speech and Language Therapist will give you some exercises to do while the electrodes are in place.
- ☐ It's to help you swallow better so you can eat and drink more easily.
- ☐ It's a very small device with four electrodes.

Share your knowledge

- 1 Why would you use this technology for a patient with a swallowing problem?
- 2 What other new technology/innovations can assist when helping a patient with a swallowing problem?