

Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES)

What is the Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES) procedure?

FEES is a procedure whereby an endoscope (a long, thin flexible tube with a camera at the end) is passed down through the nostril into the throat. The patient will be asked to swallow small amounts of food and fluids of different consistencies, while the Speech Therapist records and accesses the video imaging. The food and fluids are mixed with food dyes to allow better visualisation of its trace down the throat.

Why do I need this procedure?

FEES is recommended to patients who have dysphagia (swallowing difficulties). Swallowing impairments can result in food or drinks entering the airway and lungs during eating or drinking. Some people do cope with small amounts of aspiration. However, others may not be able to tolerate it as well leading to infected lung tissues – resulting in aspiration pneumonia. Inadequate food and fluid intake directly caused by dysphagia may also result in dehydration and malnutrition. Dysphagia can cause a deterioration in one's quality of life.

FEES is an objective investigation that allows the Speech Therapist to have a visual assessment of the patient's throat area during swallowing. This allows the Speech Therapist to (where applicable):

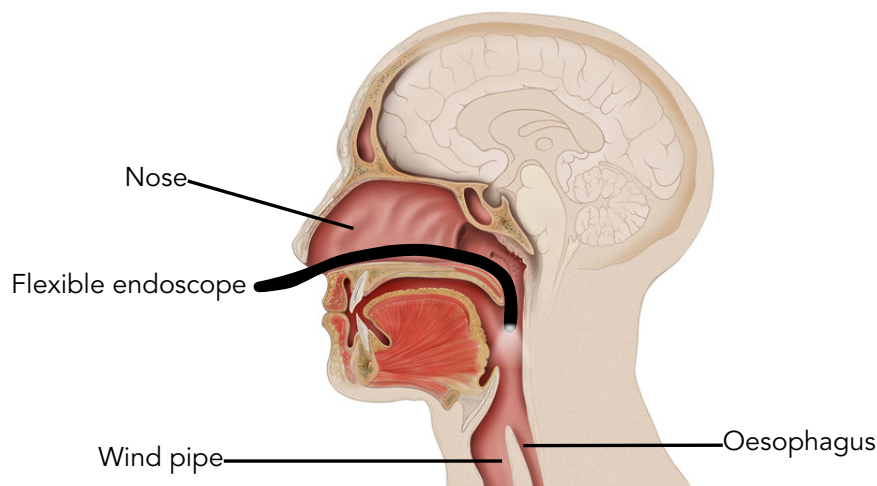
- Recommend suitable food and fluid consistencies for oral feeding
- Review for any anatomical or physiological deficits in the throat area
- Visualise secretion management and vocal cord function

What does the FEES procedure involve?

FEES will be carried out by a team consisting of a Speech Therapist and a Therapy Assistant at the Speech Therapy clinic or in the wards. The procedure is expected to take approximately 30 minutes. During the procedure, the patient is seated in an upright position on a chair or bed. The flexible endoscope will be inserted via the nostril. Small amounts of dyed food and fluids will be given to the patient to swallow while the endoscope is in position.

If necessary, the Speech Therapist may carry out the following:

- Guide the patient to do swallow strategies so as to evaluate its effectiveness
- Remove the patient's nasogastric feeding tube



What are the possible risks and complications of FEES?

Whilst precautions are taken to reduce the risk and complications of the procedure, you may experience the following:

- Mild discomfort during the insertion of the endoscope
- Gagging or vomiting
- Nose bleeding
- Brief spasm of the voice box
- Changes in heart rate and blood pressure
- Risk of aspiration on small amounts of dyed food and fluids

What can I expect after the procedure?

The Speech Therapist will provide an objective diagnosis of the swallowing impairment and recommend the safest feeding mode and/or food and fluid consistencies. The Speech Therapist will also discuss the management plan with you.

If you require a specialist referral based on the findings, this will be communicated to your doctor who will further discuss this with you.



Are there alternatives to FEES?

An alternative procedure to assess swallowing is the Videofluoroscopic Swallowing Study (VFSS). Although both FEES and VFSS provide objective information on the patient's swallow profile, FEES has the added advantage of allowing the Speech Therapist to visualise the larynx (voice box). The Speech Therapist will decide on the most appropriate objective assessment based on the patient's swallow profile and medical status.



VFSS: Video X-rays are obtained during a swallow

Contributed by Speech Therapy, Rehabilitation, Allied Health Services

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