

Clinical Perspective

The effectiveness of orofacial myofunctional therapy in improving patients' ability to swallow pills

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Clinical Exchange

The Effectiveness of Oral Myofunctional Therapy in Improving Patients' Ability to Swallow Pills

Roberta B. Pierce, M.A.T., CCC-SP, C.O.M.

This entire issue of the I.J.O.M. is dedicated to research validating that what we do as orofacial myologists makes a difference in our patient's lives.

Within A.S.H.A. (American Speech-Language Hearing Association) a primary emphasis is on "functional outcomes", providing evidence that treatment received by the patient benefits the patient in functional everyday activities.

The data in this report was obtained from the clinical charts of 100 patients who had orofacial myology evaluation/consultation and subsequent therapy in the office of the author from January 1990 through June 1996.

At the time of the initial evaluation, 39 patients reported difficulty swallowing pills, 8 had never attempted, and 2 patients' charts had no information. Rather than just ask "Is it hard for you to swallow pills?", it is often a good idea to ask a follow-up question, "What do you have to do to make the pill go down?". Occasionally, a patient will respond "no, it's not hard for me to swallow pills" but when asked how they do it, they may describe tilting the neck way back and dropping it in or putting it way back on the tongue or drinking large amounts of water - certainly not "normal" behaviors for swallowing pills.

Looking at diagrams of the correct and incorrect swallowing patterns, it is easy to see how swallowing pills can be difficult for tongue thrusters. (figure 1). If the pill is placed on the middle of the tongue, it can be hard to get it over the hump in the back of the tongue and down the throat.

Of the 100 patient charts which were analyzed, 39 reported difficulty swallowing pills at the initial evaluation. All 100 patients were able to swallow pills easily at the conclusion of ten to twelve lessons of tongue thrust therapy. "Ability to swallow pills" is a "functional outcome" of tongue thrust therapy.

Patient Ability to Swallow Pills Before Treatment

• No problems	51
• Problems (hard or can't)	39
• Never tried or attempted	8
• Unsure, no information	2

Patient Ability to Swallow Pills After Treatment-100%!

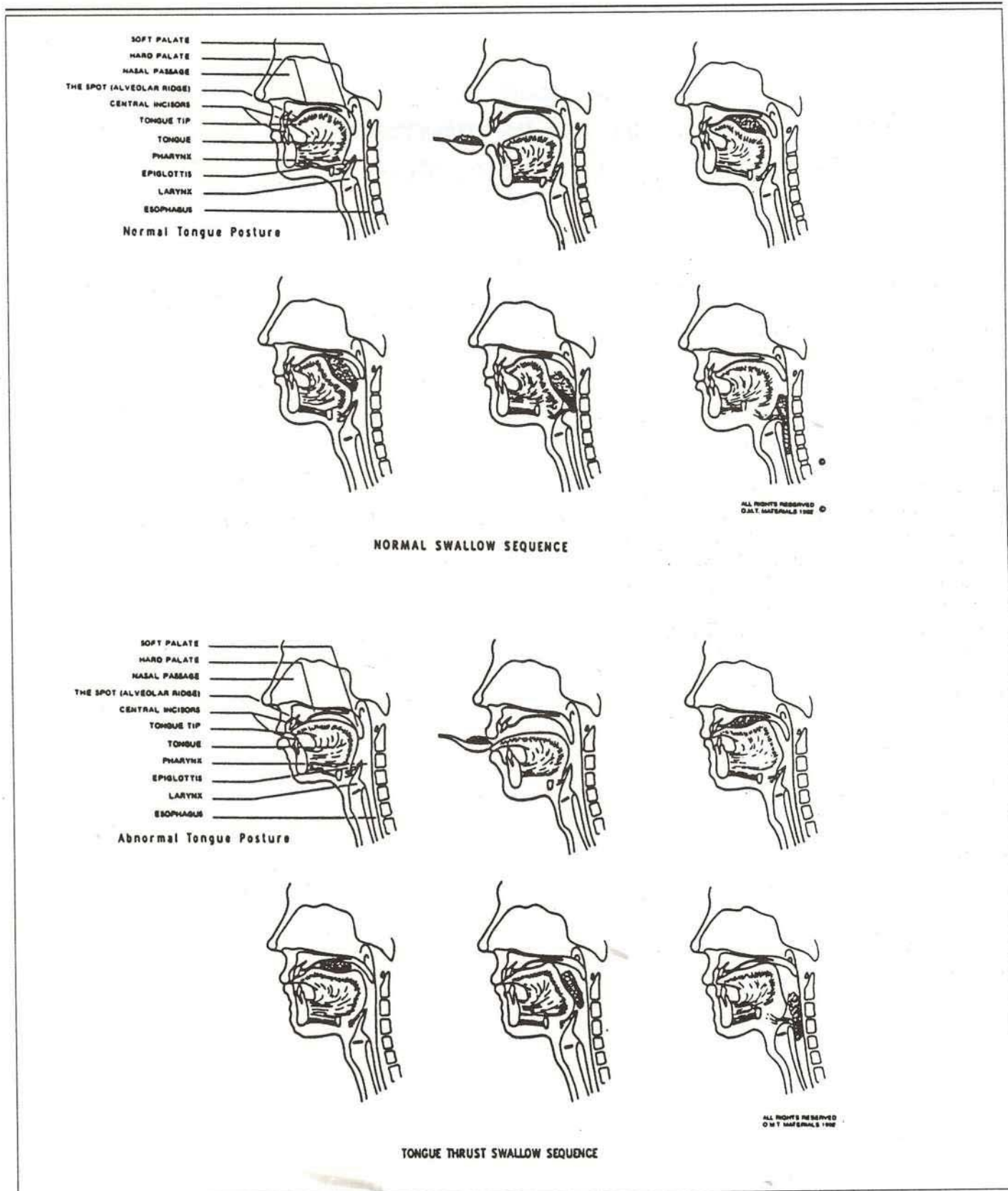


Figure 1. Swallow Sequence Posters. Reprinted with permission from William and Julie Zickefoose. Sacramento, CA: OMT Materials