

Skill training in swallowing rehabilitation

As an area of rehabilitation early in its development, our practices for managing dysphagia are changing dramatically. Historically rehabilitation approaches for neurogenic dysphagia have focused primarily on muscle strengthening. This is in large part due to the early concept that the reflex could not be adapted, but peripheral muscle underlying that reflex could be strengthened. With our increased understanding of cortical modulation of swallowing, new skill-based training approaches are emerging. The focus of this presentation will be an evaluation of existing rehabilitation approaches for swallowing impairment and an exploration of emerging options that maximise cortical contribution to this heavily modulated reflexive behaviour. Inherent in this discussion is the identification of limitations in our current diagnostic methods for defining specific pathophysiologic features of impairment and the influence of these limitations on development patient specific treatment protocols.