

## Other options for therapy

Trismus that cannot simply be improved with this exercise may require the attention of a health care professional that specialises in the management of jaw dysfunction. Ask your doctor, nurse or speech pathologist for further advice.

## Other notes:

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## Your speech pathologist is:

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**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Hours:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Resources

Qld Health web site  
The Cancer Council of Queensland  
[www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk)

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# Speech Pathology and Radiation Oncology

## Reduced Jaw Opening (Trismus)



health · care · people

## What is trismus?

Trismus is the term used to describe reduced mouth opening. If you have trismus you may have difficulty opening your mouth like you used to. You may also experience pain with chewing or talking. Trismus can affect how you:-

- Open your mouth, bite, chew and eat.
- Open your mouth to clean your teeth.
- Speak.
- Yawn.



## Why do some patients who have radiation therapy get trismus?

Some patients may already have trismus from surgery or from the location of the cancer.

Radiation therapy that is directed towards the jaw and mouth area can cause trismus. Radiation therapy targeting this area can cause inflammation and tightening of the muscles and ligaments. When trismus occurs it is because muscles and ligaments of the jaw have become stiff.

Trismus usually occurs gradually. It can occur following surgery, during treatment, or months or even years after radiation therapy.

## How do I know if I have trismus?

A simple way to test for trismus is to insert 3 fingers (index, middle, and ring fingers) into your mouth. If you can not 'stack' 3 fingers between your upper and lower teeth, or dentures, you may have trismus. You may also have trismus if you have a feeling of tightness when you open your mouth.

## What is the speech pathologist's role?

Your speech pathologist can assess your jaw movement and give you stretching exercises to help you maintain or improve the opening of your mouth. They can monitor your progress with exercises and modify them if required.



## Trismus therapy

Your speech pathologist may recommend exercises for trismus. The following exercise should be done 5 times a day. Your speech pathologist can help demonstrate how to do it.

You will need tongue depressors to do the following exercise.



## Trismus exercise

- 1) Place a few tongue depressors flat and insert them between your teeth. Gradually add more & build them up one on top of the other. Insert as many as you can between your teeth. You will feel a stretch in your jaw as you do this, but you should not feel pain.
- 2) Once you have as many tongue depressors as you can between your teeth hold this for 30 seconds.
- 3) Repeat this exercise 5 times.
- 4) Repeat this whole routine a total of 5 times a day.

**5 stretches x 30 seconds  
Repeated 5 times per day.**

Your speech pathologist can help you determine how long to continue with this exercise.

## Dental considerations when doing these exercises:

When exercising, train your jaw to open downwards towards your Adams apple. Avoid moving your jaw forward when opening, as this sliding forward movement can increase strain on the muscles of your jaw joint.

## Therabite system

The Therabite is a commercially available exercise jaw mobiliser system that can also assist with the treatment of trismus. Ask your speech pathologist about this system if you are interested.

