

## VitalStim® Therapy Can Help Patients With Dysphagia

### **Dysphagia:** a debilitating condition.

Dysphagia is defined as difficulty with swallowing. It can occur as a result of a stroke or other neurological disease, normal aging or after a long period of inactivity. An estimated 15 million adults in the US currently suffer from dysphagia.

People who don't eat or drink enough are more likely to become ill or experience longer recovery times. In addition, patients with dysphagia carry a large psychological burden; many develop depression and withdraw from society because sharing of food and drink is such a big part of daily life.

The management of this condition consists mainly of diet modification to decrease choking episodes; a feeding tube may be inserted in the stomach.

In the last few years, new treatment options have become available – especially the use of electrical stimulation. This exciting treatment tool, **VitalStim® Therapy**, is showing good outcomes in most patients with relatively few treatments. It is simple for certified clinicians to administer and is pain free for the patient.



Very few treatment options  
have been available until  
recently and most have  
not been very effective.

VITALSTIM  
THERAPY

## When **YOU** can't **swallow**

Questions & Answers about Treating  
Dysphagia with Electrical Stimulation



 **Empi**  
Recovery  
Sciences®

599 Cardigan Road  
St. Paul, MN 55126-4099 USA

www.empi.com  
www.vitalstimtherapy.com  
1.800.328.2536

All Rights Reserved. M20080033 Rev 01 © 2008 Empi, 06/08  
Caution: Federal law restricts this device to sale by or on the  
order of a physician.

a  company  
DJOglobal.com

VITALSTIM  
THERAPY

### What To Expect When You Are Receiving VitalStim Therapy

If you've been diagnosed with dysphagia, you probably have a lot of questions. Dysphagia is defined as difficulty in swallowing. Patients with dysphagia usually exhibit signs of penetration or aspiration (food or liquid getting into the lungs), muscle weakness and difficulty managing a normal diet. An impaired swallow often results in feeding restrictions, which in turn contribute to a decline in quality of life.

### Who Is A Typical Patient?

Typical patient categories include, but are not limited to:

- Stroke
- Various other neuromuscular disease processes (e.g., Parkinson's, ALS, etc.)
- Head and neck cancer (post radiation) and/or surgery
- De-conditioning as a result of age or co-morbidity

### Am I A Candidate For VitalStim Therapy?

If you show signs of aspiration or have difficulty managing your diet, you may be a candidate for dysphagia therapy. Look for one or more of the following signs and symptoms:

- Coughing/clearing throat after swallowing
- Abnormal volitional cough
- Decreased voice quality (wet, hoarse, weak)
- Recurring chest infections
- Multiple swallows or special maneuvers required to clear throat
- Difficulty completing a meal
- Feeling of food being stuck in the throat
- Modified diet required (thickening, pureeing food; soft solids)
- Difficulty initiating a swallow
- Spilling food or liquid from lips and/or drooling

### Is VitalStim Therapy Cleared By The FDA?

VitalStim Therapy has served as a safe and effective treatment for patients with dysphagia since it received FDA clearance in 2001. There are few contraindications for receiving this therapy. With a complete medical history, your dysphagia therapist and medical team will make the decision with you about whether or not to use this specific therapy intervention.

### Who Provides This Therapy?

Your physician must write a prescription for you to receive VitalStim Therapy. Once a prescription is received, a clinical evaluation is performed by a dysphagia therapist – usually a Speech Language Pathologist - to determine candidacy for therapy. At this time, information about your past and present medical history will be taken. Information about your current cognitive status, functional swallowing ability and your own perception will be recorded. Usually, at this time, other exams will be scheduled either with x-ray, ENT or GI as appropriate.

### How Does VitalStim Therapy Work?

VitalStim Therapy is designed to help swallowing through the use of Neuromuscular Electrical Stimulation (NMES). Electrical stimulation is used to aid muscle strengthening to rehabilitate the swallow. The sensory stimulation that is provided also helps muscle recruitment and swallowing function.

A VitalStim Therapy program is typically administered 3 to 5 days per week for one hour. Most patients can expect their VitalStim Therapy program to last one month.

A typical session begin the dysphagia therapists cleansing the skin with a special alcohol swab. Sometimes, moist heat and massage will be applied to improve the effects of the treatment. The dysphagia therapist will then attach the electrodes to the neck. Once turned on, the VitalStim device provides stimulation to the target muscles. At this time, your therapist will coach you through active swallowing exercises that include: "Swallow hard, swallow fast" and "swallow in a single contraction". These swallows will include food and liquids that are deemed appropriate by your dysphagia therapist.

### Preventing Complications:

- Continue working with your physician to manage your reflux with proper medications and lifestyle changes.
- Follow all diet modifications as instructed by your dysphagia therapist.
- Report any changes in your swallow ability to your dysphagia therapist (i.e., increased coughing, choking, etc).
- Follow your home program.
- Track your meals and oral intake at home in a food log as instructed by your dysphagia therapist.
- Report any changes in your respiratory status to your dysphagia therapist (i.e., fever, cough, chest congestion, etc.).
- Attend all scheduled therapy sessions.
- Work with your therapist to modify your schedule if conflicts arise.

To learn more about VitalStim Therapy or to find a VitalStim Therapy provider near you, visit [www.vitalstimtherapy.com](http://www.vitalstimtherapy.com) or call **1.800.506.1130**.

