

Medication



Dry Mouth Simulation

This simulation explores the challenges older adults face when taking medications while experiencing swallowing difficulties (dysphagia). Dysphagia is common among aging populations and can significantly impact medication adherence. When swallowing becomes uncomfortable or anxiety-inducing, patients may delay, skip, or alter medications. This becomes even more complex in the context of polypharmacy, where multiple medications must be taken daily.

This activity is designed to help you physically experience how dryness, discomfort, and effort can interfere with something as simple as swallowing medication. By connecting this experience to clinical practice, you can better understand the barriers patients face and identify safer alternatives.

Materials

- 1 saltine cracker (or dry bread)
- 1 small hard candy (size of an M&M or Skittle)
- 1 cup of water
- Timer



Safety Note

Ensure the candy is small. Do not use large lozenges. Do not rush. Stop immediately if you feel uncomfortable.

Procedure

1. Pick up the saltine cracker. Take a bite and begin chewing.
2. Do not drink any water while chewing. Eat the cracker completely dry.
3. Continue chewing until it becomes a thick paste. Notice how your mouth becomes dry, and swallowing becomes more difficult.
4. Take approximately 45 seconds to finish chewing and swallow the cracker completely.
5. Pick up the small candy. Treat this as a prescribed medication.
6. Place the candy on your tongue and attempt to swallow it without water.
7. Pay attention to how it feels—notice any sticking, discomfort, or increased effort required.
8. Continue attempting for 30 seconds.
9. Take a small sip of water.
10. Attempt to swallow the candy again.
11. Observe how lubrication changes the ease of swallowing.

Reflection Questions

1. How did swallowing feel without water compared to with water?
2. Did you experience discomfort, hesitation, or anxiety during the activity?
3. How might repeated experiences like this affect a patient's willingness to take medications?
4. What risks might arise if patients alter medications (e.g., crushing pills) to avoid swallowing difficulties?
5. What strategies or alternatives could healthcare providers recommend to support patients with dysphagia?