

Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES) Guideline

Effective Date: _____

Revised Date(s): _____

Facility Name: _____

Summary

It is the procedure of this facility to provide flexible endoscopic evaluations of swallowing (FEES) in a safe and responsible manner for the evaluation of swallowing disorders. This guideline aligns with state regulations for safe and effective implementation of FEES, including its use as a valuable tool in assessing swallowing and promoting patient-centered care.

Application

This guideline applies to speech-language pathologists (SLPs) working at this facility who are trained in performing this procedure in accordance with state regulations, including the speech-language pathology state licensing board and state health department (or equivalent governing body) regulations for competencies and safety.

Description of Exam

Flexible endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES) is a pharyngeal and laryngeal imaging procedure that SLPs use to assess swallowing function, following facility and state regulations. FEES involves placing a flexible endoscope transnasally into the pharynx for direct visualization of anatomy and swallowing physiology. This assessment may include evaluation of airway protection, timing of swallow initiation, pharyngeal clearance, and the movement of various consistencies through the pharynx ([ASHA, n.d.](#)). Therapeutic maneuvers may be trialed to improve swallow efficiency and safety. A FEES exam supports clinical decisions regarding the anatomy and physiology of the swallowing mechanism, the impact of swallow anatomy and physiology on management of diet textures and secretions, the impact of compensatory and restorative maneuvers, treatment planning, and the need for further evaluations.

FEES Prerequisites

SLPs who perform FEES must meet the following qualifications:

- A current state license to practice speech-language pathology
- Alignment with state-specific FEES regulations, per the SLP state licensing board and state health department (or equivalent governing body)
- Completion of a FEES training course (if required by facility and/or state)
- Completion of supervised endoscope passes with associated documentation (if required by facility and/or state)
- Completion of facility clinical competencies in FEES (if required by facility and/or state)

Patient Selection Criteria

Patients are selected for FEES based on the SLP's clinical judgment. The following indications may warrant a FEES exam:

- concerns or safety issues associated with radiation exposure (e.g., pregnancy)
- difficulties with obstructed fluoroscopic viewing (e.g., patients wearing a halo)
- documented pharyngeal dysphagia on videofluoroscopic swallow study (VFSS/MBSS) that can be retested with endoscopy to
 - monitor progress,
 - directly assess pharyngeal and laryngeal anatomy, and/or
 - limit radiation exposure
- inability to assess certain feeding methods during VFSS/MBSS, like infant breastfeeding
- inability to tolerate contrast media (e.g., barium, iohexol) due to allergy or aversion
- limited access to radiologic equipment
- need for visualization of the hypopharynx/larynx for biofeedback and/or rehabilitation
- need to assess vocal fold dynamics or the laryngeal adductor reflex (LAR) related to swallow function
- patients' inability (e.g., patients on ventilators, patients on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation [ECMO]) to leave the bedside because of mobility and/or postural deficits
- sensitivity to increased difficulty with swallowing over the course of a bottle feeding, breastfeeding, or meal, secondary to suspected fatigue
- sensitivity to velum function for hypernasality and/or suspected nasal regurgitation
- suspected or observed difficulty with swallowing saliva/oral secretions

Patient Exclusion Criteria

The following contraindications are specific to FEES:

- bilateral obstruction of the nasal passages

- history of recent trauma to the nasal cavity or surrounding tissue and structures secondary to surgery or injury
- severe agitation and/or inability to cooperate with the examination
- severe bleeding disorders and/or recent severe epistaxis (nosebleed)
- severe movement disorders that interfere with safe administration

NOTE: Decisions around FEES candidacy should include medical and therapeutic discussion with the patient's interprofessional care team.

Potential Complications and Risks Associated With FEES

The procedure may be terminated if deemed unsafe by the SLP, by medical staff, or at the patient or medical decision maker's request. Potential risks may include ([Langmore, 2001](#))

- an allergic reaction or hypersensitivity to topical anesthesia or nasal spray (when clinically appropriate and when permitted by facility and state regulations),
- discomfort,
- epistaxis (nosebleed),
- laryngospasm,
- mucosal perforation, and/or
- vomiting.

Procedure

Preparation and procedural steps for FEES:

1. The SLP obtains a provider's order for FEES, if indicated by facility, state, and payer guidelines.
2. The SLP reviews the patient's medical status to assess for changes from initial swallowing evaluation, deferring FEES exam if clinically indicated.
3. The SLP explains the procedure to the patient and/or medical decision maker and obtains informed consent, which is documented in the patient's medical record.
4. The SLP prepares necessary equipment.
5. The SLP prepares a variety of food/liquid textures, adding food coloring as needed.
6. The SLP completes the exam at bedside or chairside.
7. During the procedure, the SLP records FEES to device, external hard drive, or EMR, following facility information security policies.
8. The SLP interprets results and documents recommendations, educating the patient, their care partners, and medical staff on results and recommendations.
9. The SLP cleans the endoscope according to facility and/or state infection control guidelines.

Responsibilities

The SLP will carry out all the following responsibilities:

- Follow manufacturer-provided guidelines to ensure proper handling, maintenance, and storage of equipment.
- Adhere to facility, state, and payer guidelines when performing FEES exams.
- Demonstrate and maintain competency as outlined by facility guidelines.
- Ensure that all procedures comply with the facility's infection prevention and control policies.
- Document exam findings accurately and in accordance with facility and state requirements.
- Collaborate with the interdisciplinary team to integrate FEES results into patient care planning.

References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). (n.d.). *Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES)*. <https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/resources/flexible-endoscopic-evaluation-of-swallowing/>

Langmore, S. E. (2001). Endoscopic evaluation and treatment of swallowing disorders. Thieme.