



Health Alert: Swallowing stimulator

(National) March 11, 2006 - What would you do if you couldn't eat your favorite foods? Millions of Americans have a swallowing disorder that prevents them from doing just that. But, a new device could change their lives for the better.

Two-year-old Annaliese Martin is doing what many people take for granted, eating. Pamela Clarke-Levens, MS, is seeing improvement in the young patient, "Her muscles are significantly stronger than they were. Her swallowing is more coordinated."

Annaliese is being treated for dysphagia, which is the inability to swallow because of weakened or damaged muscles or nerves. Her speech pathologist is using a device, called the VitalStim, as part of her therapy.

Clarke-Levens talks about the therapy, "It's actually swallowing therapy with electrical stimulation, wherein we put electrodes on the neck, um, that can access the pharyngeal muscles. And what that electrodes, what those electrodes will do they make the swallow response faster and stronger."

The procedure is simple. The electrodes are placed on the patient's throat while they eat or drink. The electrodes contract and strengthen the muscles.

It's encouraging for Karlynnne Martin, "She's really made some strides that we couldn't have made so quickly in such a short amount of time on her own."

After only four weeks Annaliese can eat a wider variety of foods. Karlynnne says, "She had problems, um, knowing exactly how to move the baby food from the front of her mouth to the back, and then have problems swallowing. And occasionally she would turn purple, um, she would stop breathing and she would choke."

Those days are over thanks to VitalStim. And Anneleise is on her way to eating like any two-year-old.

VitalStim is also used to help stroke and cancer patients of all ages with swallowing problems. It's available at a number of hospitals around the country.

If you'd like more information on VitalStim you can [visit the website](#)>>

Posted 5:00pm by [Chantelle Janelle](#)