Assessment of Swallowing Function in Healthy Adults While Using High-Flow Nasal Cannula

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INTRODUCTION

• High flow nasal cannula (HFNC) is a widely-used, well-established respiratory support device used in patients with respiratory compromise.
• HFNC is associated with superior comfort, improved patient tolerance, decreased work of breathing, and decreased need for escalation of oxygen therapy in comparison to conventional oxygen therapy.3
• Despite widespread use, the effect of HFNC on swallowing physiology is poorly understood.
• Research to date has demonstrated that impairments of the respiratory tract can diminish swallowing safety.4,5
• Studies have suggested that healthy individuals may have diminished swallowing function at higher flow rates of HFNC.4,5
• Guidance on oral alimentation initiation while on HFNC is limited; no safe swallow flow rates have been definitively established.6,7
• The aim of our study was to assess the swallowing function and safety in a cohort of pre-screened, non-dysphagic, healthy individuals using Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES), during HFNC administration at various flow rates.

METHODOLOGY

• Healthy subjects 18 to 65 years of age were enrolled.
• Exclusion criteria included score of ≥3 on Eating Assessment Tool-50 questionnaire, history of swallowing or respiratory disorders, history of medical conditions or medication use affecting swallowing or breathing, history of recent hospital admission.
• Five randomized rounds of testing were performed: 0, 30, 40, 50, 60 LPM.
• Each round of testing was conducted using three consistencies: thin liquids, mildly-thick liquids, and purées.
• Each trial, excluding purées, included three sub-trials: 1 cup sip, 3 consecutive cup sips, and a 5 ml bolus by teaspoon.
• Two Speech-Language Pathologists independently graded each swallow using the PAS Scale (Figure 1).
• A PAS score of 1-5 was considered a safe swallow, while a PAS score of 6-8 was considered an unsafe swallow.
• Pearson chi-square tests were used to test for significant correlation (P<0.05) between PAS result and rate of HFNC and consistency across each sub-trial of each consistency.

RESULTS

• Twenty seven subjects were enrolled.
• Forty one percent were male with a mean age of 34 years (11 SD).
• There was no significant correlation between swallowing safety and flow rate using Pearson Chi-Square test across all consistencies and across all quantities of materials (P>0.05).
• In subgroup analysis of 1 sip swallows, 99% (26/27) of swallows were safe, and 1% (3/270) were unsafe with no difference related to consistency tested (Table 1).
• In subgroup analysis of 3 sips, 97% (n=26/27) of swallows were safe, and 3% (n=7/270) were unsafe with no difference related to consistency tested (Table 1).
• Of note, of all sub-trials, the thin liquid, 3 sips trial at 60 LPM, had the largest percent of unsafe swallows (14%).
• In subgroup analysis of 5 ml trials, 99% (n=39/405) of swallows were safe, while only 2% (6/405) were unsafe.

CONCLUSION

• Our analysis demonstrated no significant correlation between swallowing safety and rate of HFNC using Pearson Chi-Square tests across all consistencies and across all quantities of materials.
• We demonstrate that in non-dysphagic, healthy individuals, increasing rates of HFNC does not diminish swallowing safety.
• The same results were found when PAS scores of 1-2 were defined as safe swallows, and scores of 3-8 were considered unsafe swallows.
• Our finding that thin liquid swallows are more frequently unsafe at higher flow rates than lower rates is consistent with prior studies that showed thin liquids have higher risk of aspiration due to diminished bolus control.
• This study adds new data to the very limited literature examining swallowing safety while on HFNC.
• Our study is the first to use FEES for swallowing safety assessment in patients on HFNC.

REFERENCES