

# Swallowing & Speaking: Important Differences

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The Swallowing Series for Therapists, Parents and Clients  
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Although swallowing and speaking are created with the same oral mechanism, they are vastly different.

From beginning to end, swallowing involves the careful coordination of several muscles. It's sometimes considered a fairly automatic function but can be consciously modified by the swallower. It is a discreet, almost-overlapping, swallow preparation and propulsion oral maneuver: Suction: Bite, Squeeze, Lift.

Like speaking, the oral stage of swallowing is a very personal function performed by the tongue, lips, and jaw. But there's where the pattern similarities end. Speaking requires a known set of tongue contours, placements, and tensions plus airflow and phonation to fulfill all the speech-sound requirements.

Speech is an amazing blend of the formulation of thoughts via language and the oral sensory-motor system that transports the message. Speech is produced for listeners; it's intended for others. Speech, unlike the other oral functions, swallowing and chewing, is something we create and simultaneously give away.

In comparison to swallowing and chewing, speaking is a high-level, refined, sophisticated skill. Speaking requires deft lingual adjustments by the lips, the front-tongue, and the back-tongue. Its oral interactions are continuously reshaped for potentially long periods of time; speaking requires lingual endurance.

Swallowing, on the other hand, is an aggressive, effortful one-shot encounter with the roof of the mouth. The whole tongue systematically compresses against the roof of the mouth, forcefully rolling and stripping the contents back and down.

Comparisons of Swallowing and Speaking Features ([Deconstructing Speaking & Swallowing](#)):

- Swallowing lacks the passage of oral-airflow; speech is made audible with the orchestrated efforts of the respiratory sub-system and phonatory sub-system.
- Swallowing necessitates a preparatory stage (intra-oral suctioning and gathering to the tongue); speaking goes straight from resting position to speech-contacts and maneuvers.
- Swallowing necessitates good lingual tonicity; speaking necessitates good lingual tonicity and movement endurance. (Speaking and chewing are endurance activities; swallowing is not.)
- Swallowing requires vertical tongue movement and lingua-palatal pressure; speaking requires vertical tongue movement with minimal lingua-palatal pressure.
- In swallowing the movements are slower and more deliberate than speech movements.
- Swallowing contains one basic vertical movement; speech-contacts require a vast variety of vertical movements (with one exception, the "th").

Who knew?!