

# What is “Tongue Thrust”?

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The Swallowing Series for Therapists, Parents and Clients  
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The term “tongue thrust” refers to an abnormal, tongue-forward swallow. The tongue, postured at the mid-line of the mouth, moves horizontally toward and against, or between the front teeth. Conversely, a desirable swallow occurs when the tongue moves vertically up to the hard palate (the roof of the mouth).

Other abnormal characteristics of a tongue thrust swallow include top and bottom teeth that are apart during the swallow, as well as the presence of an abnormal gathering process. The gathering is done via intra-oral suctioning that accumulates the food, liquid, and saliva to the tongue. Gathering during a tongue thrust swallow is typically different and not as effective as it should be.

There are several other terms used for a “tongue thrust”: an anterior swallow, a horizontal swallow, a reverse swallow, an infantile swallow, and a juvenile swallow. They all pretty much mean the same thing: The tongue moves horizontally (forward) when it should be moving vertically (up).

In addition, sometimes the term “tongue thrust” is used, minus the word “swallow.” Some professionals apply this term comprehensively for any abnormal forward tongue movement during any function—speaking, chewing, swallowing, or even when the tongue is at rest.

Also, I’ve seen “tongue thrust” used as an alternative term to describe “interdental speech productions” (which is a better descriptive term). That’s when the tongue moves anteriorly and interacts against the front teeth while producing “t,” “d,” and “n.” Interestingly, when someone produces a “frontal /s/” (a frontal lisp), it is called a “frontal /s/” not a “tongue thrust /s/.”

Basically, a “tongue thrust” is typically reserved as a label for an abnormal, anterior swallow.

Tongue thrust swallowing therapy is a principal part of myofunctional therapy. It refers to the type of instruction used to generate a good, unharmed, consistent, comfortable, vertical swallow. The term “tongue thrust” is also used and applied within a broader category, called Orofacial Myology.