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Tongue stretching: technique and clinical proposal

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Abstract

Objectives: The tongue is an organ with multiple functions, from sucking to phonation, from swallowing to postural control and equilibrium. An incorrect position or mechanics of the tongue can causes sucking problems in the newborn or atypical swallowing in the adult, with repercussions on the position of the head and neck, up to influencing upright posture and other problems. Tongue dysfunctions are quite frequent (10-15%) in the population. For the manual therapist, this frequency indicates one to two subjects every 30 patients. Exercises have been proposed to improve the tone and strength of the swallowing muscles but the results are not so clear in the literature. The aim of this study is to describe and provide a tongue muscle normalization technique that helps the manual therapist in the treatment of problems related to it.

Methods: The literature has been investigated through pubmed, Google scholar of the last 10 years, the keywords used and combined with the Boolean operators AND and OR, are: "tongue, tongue habits, tongue diseases, taste disorder, neck pain, posture, postural balance, atypical swallowing, muscle stretching exercise, tissue expansion, soft tissue therapy, osteopathic manipulative treatment".

Results and conclusions: The technique is possible to be executed even in a sitting position, in the case the patient is unable to assume a supine position, the subject should provides immediate feedback that allows the therapist to understand if the technique has been correctly executed. The simplicity of execution and application of the technique makes it a possible and immediate therapeutic tool in the clinical setting.

Keywords: atypical swallowing; manual therapy; muscle stretching exercise; osteopathic manipulative treatment; postural balance; tongue; tongue diseases.

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