

# Referral Guidelines for FEES

## (Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing)

### What is FEES?

**FEES (Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing)** is a sensitive, accurate, portable, and safe examination that yields clinically useful information relative to swallowing physiology and swallowing safety. The procedure involves passing a flexible endoscope across the floor of a patient's nasal passage into the pharynx so that the larynx, pharynx, and upper esophageal opening are viewed directly from above. The patient is administered food or liquids mixed with food coloring to determine safe swallowing function and integrity.

### There are three parts to a FEES exam:

1. Assess anatomy, physiology of structures – This allows for an in-depth assessment of pharyngeal swallow mechanism anatomy/physiology
2. Assess swallowing of food/liquid – This includes use of food coloring/dye to effectively visualize path of the bolus and potential aspiration/penetration
3. Assess response to therapeutic intervention

### Considerations for referral: FEES vs Modified Barium Swallow Study (MBSS):

Advantages of FEES	Advantages of MBSS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Direct visualization of the larynx and surrounding structures, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Surface anatomy/mucosal abnormalities (edema, erythema)</li><li>• Configuration of hypopharynx and effect on bolus flow</li><li>• Airway protection (vocal cord mobility, arytenoid movement)</li><li>• Observation of path of the bolus bilaterally</li><li>• Increased definition of bolus residue in the hypopharynx</li></ul></li><li>2. Assessment of secretion management</li><li>3. Real food in real quantities (no barium)</li><li>4. No radiation</li><li>5. Accommodates patients with specific positioning needs (e.g. larger body size; contractures; special positioning in wheelchair-no need for transfer)</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Visualization of the oral, pharyngeal, and upper esophageal phases of swallowing</li><li>2. Visualization of cervical spine</li><li>3. Best addresses specific concerns for potential upper esophageal problems, including anatomical changes (e.g. Zenker's diverticulum)</li><li>4. Best addresses specific concerns for oral phase problems</li><li>5. Best for patients who may not tolerate scope due to agitation or other contraindications</li></ol>

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<b>Contraindications and Limitations</b>	<b>Contraindications and Limitations</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recent nasal trauma, obstruction, surgery</li> <li>2. Bleeding disorder with high risk of uncontrolled epistaxis</li> <li>3. Agitation, combative behavior</li> <li>4. Severe movement disorder that may affect safe administration</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater body mass or anatomical variances that may limit field of view of positioning in tight space</li> <li>2. Requires consuming barium; potential allergies, altered taste of food/liquid</li> </ol>

Many patients may receive either MBSS or FEES. Considerations including patient preference and/or availability of appointments may guide selection. In some cases, patients may ultimately benefit from both studies for a comprehensive evaluation of their dysphagia.

If you are unsure which swallow study is the best fit, you may enter referrals for both FEES and MBSS. Consistent with our current procedure, after receiving any swallow evaluation referral, a speech-language pathologist will review the patient's chart and make recommendations regarding the best evaluation to meet the patient's needs.

#### **How to Refer Your Patients:**

##### **Internal Providers:**

SLP34 - SLP FIBEROPTIC ENDOSCOPIC EVALUATION OF SWALLOWING (FEES)

##### **External Providers:**

Valley Medical Center  
Rehabilitation Services  
Phone: 425.690.3650  
Fax: 425.690.9650

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