Cheek Patterns

Normal Cheek Pattern

The cheeks form the walls of the face. The cheek is composed of small fibers with many layers of muscle tissue, inserting at many different angles. The cheeks assist in repositioning food in the side of the mouth, in placing food between the teeth for chewing and in moving the food, fluid or saliva to the posterior of the oral cavity for swallowing. The muscles of the cheek assist with lip, jaw, and tongue movement. The receptors for swallowing are located in the posterior area of the cheeks, as well as on the gums, tongue and soft palate. The largest salivary glands, the parotid glands, are located in the cheeks. Normal cheek patterns include protrusion, retraction, and compression. Of these patterns, retraction is the easiest to complete, and compression is the most difficult.

Abnormal Cheek Patterns

Abnormal cheek patterns include hypotonicity (decreased muscle tone in the cheeks), hypertonicity (increased muscle tone in the cheeks), fluctuating tone, and atrophy due to disuse or aging. A common combination is hypertonicity anterior with hypotonicity posterior. These patterns are often seen in combination with abnormal jaw, tongue and lip patterns. Each of these abnormal cheek patterns impacts oral function. If the above patterns exist, there may be decreased awareness of pressure and movement within the oral area. Control of substances in the mouth will be adversely affected. The level of oral motor response may change, based on the texture of food presented, or on the type of handling or feeding equipment used.