

# Sustainable implementation of self-help exercise programs targeting speech and swallowing problems in patients with head and neck cancer

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## Background

Head and neck cancer (HNC) patients often experience problems with swallowing or speaking, influencing their quality of life.

In the Netherlands, two self-help exercise programs targeting these problems have been developed (Figure 1):

- 1) Head Matters (HM) for patients treated with radiotherapy
- 2) In tune without cords (ITwC) for patients treated with a total laryngectomy (i.e. removal of the entire larynx with voice box)

Both programs have been positively assessed for patient satisfaction, feasibility and (cost)effectiveness.

The next step is to ensure the structural provision of these programs in regular HNC care in the Netherlands.

## Objective

- i) to investigate barriers and facilitators of implementation of HM and ITwC among healthcare professionals
- ii) to investigate the uptake and usage of HM and ITwC among HNC patients.

Figure 1a (Head Matters)

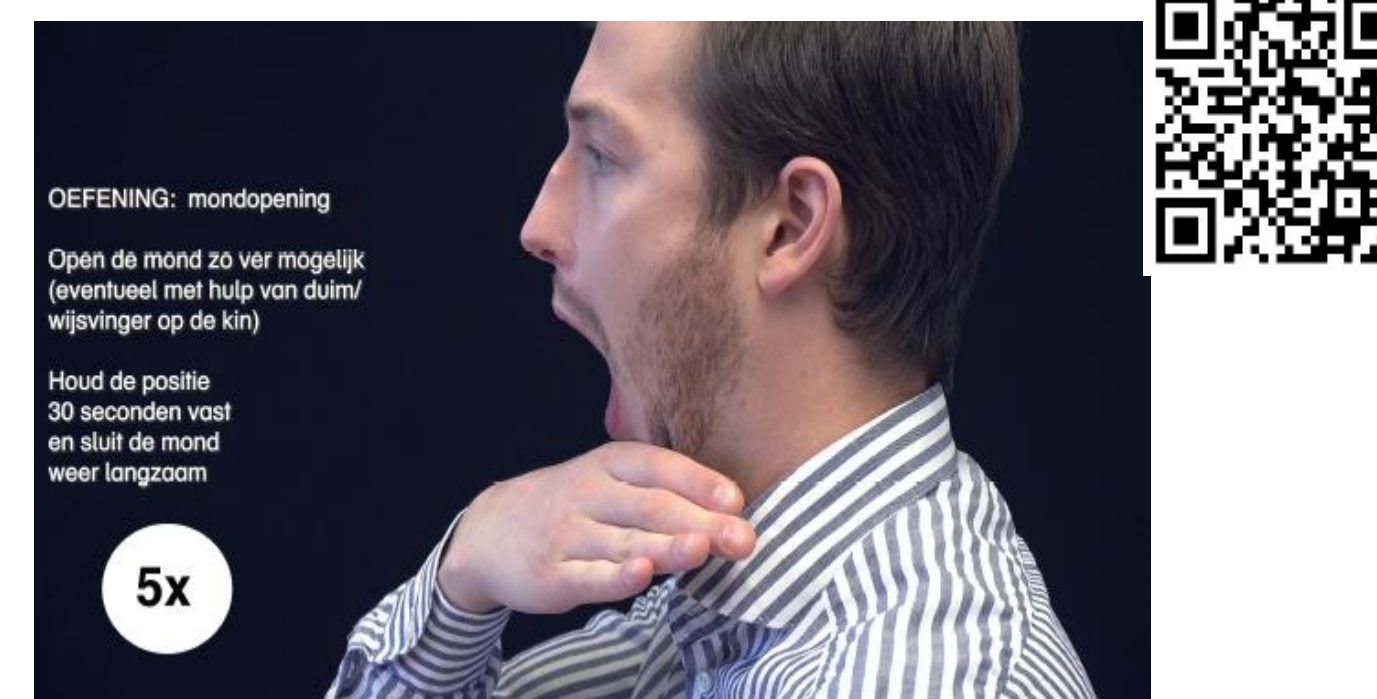
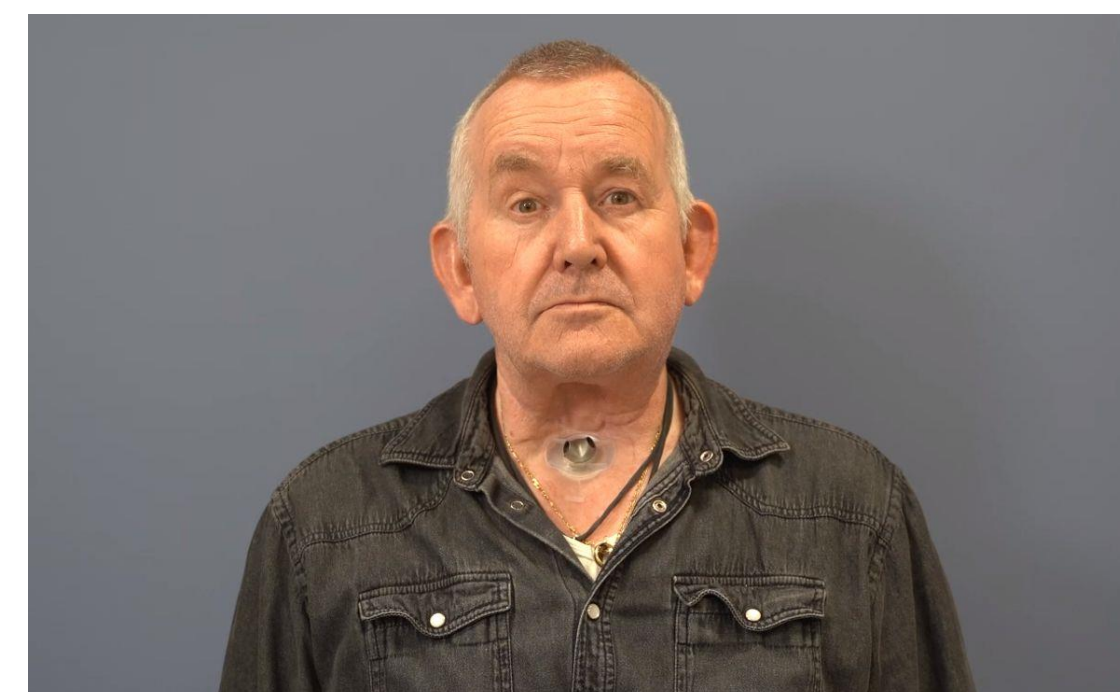


Figure 1b (In tune without cords)



## Conclusion

This project is highly relevant for the implementation of self-help exercise programs in The Netherlands and other countries.

## Methods

- Collection of information on barriers and facilitators using the Measurement Instrument for Determinants of Innovation (MIDI) (among healthcare professionals)
- Assessment of uptake and actual usage (among patients)
- Qualitative interviews on experiences barriers and facilitators (both healthcare professionals and patients)

## Results

11 of the 14 Dutch HNC centers (Figure 2, green bullets) will implement the self-help exercise programs, of which 2 currently use it.

Preliminary analyses of barriers and facilitators before implementation among 35 healthcare professionals showed that 76% was familiar with the existence of HM, although some lacked information on certain details of the program.

When focusing on speech and language pathologists (SLPs) (n=11) about half reported that HM fitted their current work flow. A potential barrier was the digital format, as some patients may have limited digital skills.

Most SLPs (80%) felt it is their task to offer HM to patients.

All SLPs felt they will succeed when offering HM to patients.

Further data collection is still ongoing.

Figure 2 Dutch HNC centers

