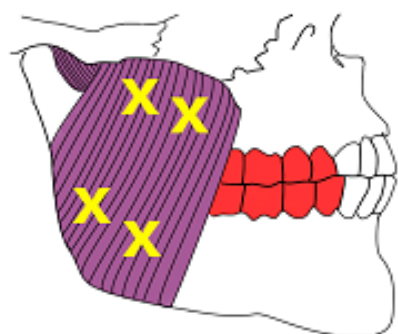


## Facial Nerve graft surgery Cranial Nerve V – Masseteric, to Cranial Nerve VII

### 6 weeks post operatively onwards

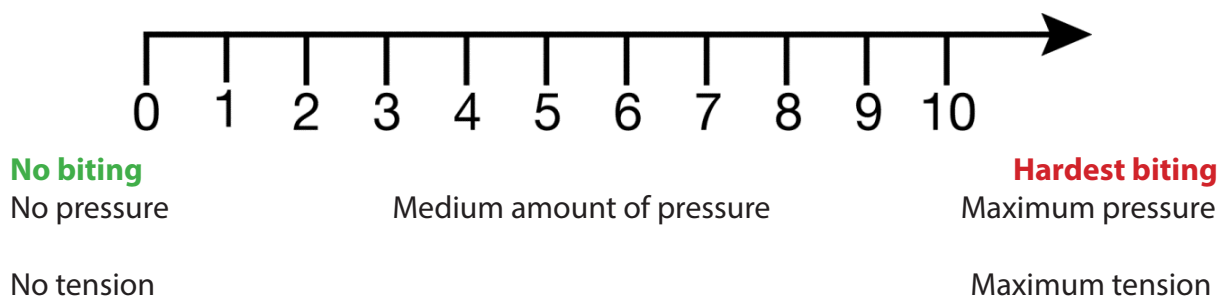


You are now ready to start your facial therapy. You will need to be patient while the nerve graft heals. This can take between 3-9 months to work.

Now that six weeks have passed since your surgery, you can begin to massage and stretch your face. You can also begin to learn how to use 'bite and smile'. Your therapist will guide you through this.

The goal of facial therapy is to teach you to bite **gently** and form a meaningful smile, and, eventually, you may be able to learn to smile without biting down.

Bite is most effective from your back teeth. Focus on being able to grade your bite from a gentle clench of the teeth to a full bite. The scale below is a helpful way to track the amount of pressure you are using to bite and gain a smile. At six weeks after surgery, you will use 10/10 maximal biting when you smile.



### How do I do my smile exercises?

Initially, it will be helpful to see how your facial muscles move following surgery. We recommend that you use a mirror or the camera mode on your phone or iPad to see how your face is moving. The feeling of motion you get while exercising your facial muscles can be very deceptive, so some visual feedback can be useful. The mirror will also help you avoid letting the good side overcompensate and move in an exaggerated way.

- Relax all the muscles in your face, so that you are not showing any expression, and your jaw is relaxed, with your teeth slightly apart.
- Look at yourself in the mirror and think about something that makes you happy or makes you laugh.
- Bite your back teeth together and do a gentle balanced smile. Placing a small sweet such as a skittle, some gum or a cotton swab between your back teeth to make this bite more effective.
- Initially you may need a lot of biting effort (up to 10/10) to be able to see any smile. As your rehabilitation continues, you will work at getting the same amount of smile with less and less biting effort.

- Focus on the corners of your mouth moving, and your cheeks gently raising up into a smile. The goal is symmetry. Your smile should be equal both sides – not a big smile on your unaffected side and a little smile on your affected side. If the affected side can only move a little bit then the unaffected side should only move a little bit as well. Both sides need to move equally. Pay attention to how it FEELS to smile in this balanced way.
  - AVOID making a BIG TOOTHY SMILE
  - AVOID moving your lower lip down, in an effort to get a bigger smile.
- Hold this “new smile” position for 3-5 seconds then relax your face.

You need to **practice little and often throughout the day** – as much as 5 times a day for 5 minutes each time.

## Progression to spontaneous smile

As you get more confident, commit to using your practised, symmetrical smile in everyday situations – this is the only way it will become more natural in the long term. For example, decide that every time you greet, or make eye contact with somebody purposefully use a ‘biting’ symmetrical smile.

At first, it may seem forced and unnatural but, with time, this will get easier and easier. Perhaps ask friends and loved ones to give you positive feedback when they see you using your symmetrical smile – this will build your confidence.

By continuing to practice, and actually using your smile, you are training your brain to allow you to smile in this way. Check occasionally using a mirror to give you some helpful feedback on symmetry. Think about how your new smile ‘feels’, and then use this in social situations. This will result in a more spontaneous smile.

## Learning to eat without smiling

You will notice that if you chew on the side of your surgery that the smile muscle contracts.

Once you have control of biting to smile, you can then begin to work on not smiling during eating. Your focus will be to relax your cheek whilst you eat. You may find it helpful initially, to eat in front of a mirror to help you control this. Food that requires more chewing will trigger a stronger smile response, so practice with different consistencies of food. Your facial therapist will help guide you through this part of your rehabilitation.

If you had chemodenervation (Botulinum toxin) therapy at the time of surgery, this will continue at 4-6 monthly intervals to help with movement symmetry. This will be in conjunction with specific exercises to promote correct movement patterns.

Your therapy will continue until you have gained sufficient movement and knowledge to continue the strengthening process independently.