Electrical stimulation of the throat for swallowing difficulties after stroke

Submission date	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	[X] Prospectively registered		
30/09/2021		[X] Protocol		
Registration date	Overall study status Ongoing Condition category	Statistical analysis plan		
05/10/2021		Results		
Last Edited		Individual participant data		
23/07/2025	Signs and Symptoms	[X] Record updated in last year		

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Acute stroke is common and complicated by dysphagia (swallowing problems) in over 50% of patients, many of whom remain dysphagic a year later. Post-stroke dysphagia (PSD) is an independent predictor of poor outcome and can lead to aspiration of material into the lungs, pneumonia, malnutrition and death. Patients often need feeding through a tube, have a prolonged hospital stay, and end up in long-term institutional care. PSD negatively impacts quality of life and its care is expensive and may be a tipping point for admission to residential care. Pharyngeal electrical stimulation (PES) is electrical stimulation of certain areas of the throat that stimulates the areas of the brain involved in swallowing. This study aims to find out whether PES is safe and effective at improving post-stroke dysphagia.

Who can participate?

Hospitalised adults (aged 18 years and over) with recent stroke (within 4-31 days) and dysphagia

What does the study involve?

Participants are randomly allocated to either the intervention group or the control group. The intervention group receives PES on days 1-6 using a commercial catheter (tube) with an integral feeding tube. PES involves six daily 10 minute treatments. The control group will receive no PES catheter/stimulation on top of best guideline-based dysphagia management. A standard tube will be used for feeding as necessary.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The PES system is a non-significant risk device and its safety is shown by evidence from multiple studies over a period of 15 years. There are no characteristic device or treatment specific effects that are considered to be serious adverse events.

Where is the study run from? University of Nottingham (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for? July 2021 to July 2025

Who is funding the study? University of Nottingham (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Philip Bath
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Contact information

Type(s)

Scientific

Contact name

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Contact details

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Public

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Additional identifiers

Clinical Trials Information System (CTIS)

Nil known

Integrated Research Application System (IRAS)

304658

ClinicalTrials.gov (NCT)

Nil known

Protocol serial number

IRAS 304658, NIHR132016, CPMS 50913

Study information

Scientific Title

Pharyngeal Electrical stimulation for Acute Stroke dysphagia Trial (PhEAST)

Acronym

PhEAST

Study objectives

To assess whether pharyngeal electrical stimulation (PES) is safe and effective at improving poststroke dysphagia.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 07/01/2022, East of England - Essex Research Ethics Committee (The Old Chapel, Royal Standard Place, Nottingham, NG1 6FS, UK; +44 (0)2071048227; essex.rec@hra.nhs.uk), ref: 21/EE/0252

Study design

International prospective randomized open-label blinded-endpoint (PROBE) parallel-group superiority Phase IV effectiveness trial

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Post-stroke dysphagia

Interventions

Current intervention as of 14/11/2023:

Randomised will be 1:1 with stratification on country and minimisation on age, sex, dysphagia severity rating scale (DSRS), impairment (National Institutes of Health stroke scale [NIHSS]), stroke type (ischaemic/haemorrhagic), circulation (anterior/posterior), time to randomisation; with 10% simple randomisation.

The intervention group will undergo PES administered for 6, ideally consecutive, days using a commercial catheter with an integral feeding tube. PES involves six daily 10 minute treatments at 5 Hz; threshold and tolerability currents will be assessed and the treatment current set at threshold + 0.75 x (tolerability - threshold) with the current generated by a base station. Dosing levels will be monitored, and sites informed if the stimulation current is too low, i.e. <20 mA; sites will be re-trained on the importance of delivering adequate current, if necessary. The catheter will be replaced once only if pulled out before three treatments have been administered. Treatment will be administered by PES-trained research coordinators, nurses or speech and language therapists (SLTs) who are not involved in outcome data collection.

The control group will receive no PES catheter/stimulation on top of best guideline-based dysphagia management. A standard NGT will be used for feeding as necessary.

Previous intervention:

Randomised will be 1:1 with stratification on country and minimisation on age, sex, dysphagia severity rating scale (DSRS), impairment (National Institutes of Health stroke scale [NIHSS]), stroke type (ischaemic/haemorrhagic), circulation (anterior/posterior), time to randomisation; with 10% simple randomisation.

The intervention group will undergo PES administered on days 1-6 using a commercial catheter with an integral feeding tube. PES involves six daily 10 minute treatments at 5 Hz; threshold and tolerability currents will be assessed and the treatment current set at threshold + 0.75 x (tolerability - threshold) with the current generated by a base station. Dosing levels will be monitored, and sites informed if the stimulation current is too low, i.e. <20 mA; sites will be retrained on the importance of delivering adequate current, if necessary. The catheter will be replaced once only if pulled out before three treatments have been administered. Treatment will be administered by PES-trained research coordinators, nurses or speech and language therapists (SLTs) who are not involved in outcome data collection.

The control group will receive no PES catheter/stimulation on top of best guideline-based dysphagia management. A standard NGT will be used for feeding as necessary.

Intervention Type

Device

Phase

Phase IV

Drug/device/biological/vaccine name(s)

Phagenyx® (Phagenesis Ltd, Manchester, UK)

Primary outcome(s)

Current primary outcome measure as of 14/11/2023:

Dysphagia assessed using the Dysphagia Severity Rating Scale (DSRS), based on bedside clinical assessment/management conducted at days 14 (-1/+3). Outcome assessment will be assessed by DSRS/Functional Oral Intake Scale (FOIS)-trained research coordinators, nurses or SLTs who are not involved in treatment.

Previous primary outcome measure:

Dysphagia assessed using the Dysphagia Severity Rating Scale (DSRS), based on bedside clinical assessment/management conducted at days 14±1. Outcome assessment will be assessed by DSRS/Functional Oral Intake Scale (FOIS)-trained research coordinators, nurses or SLTs who are not involved in treatment.

Key secondary outcome(s))

Current secondary outcome measures as of 14/11/2023:

Measured on Day 14-1/+3 (day 13-17):

- 1. Dysphagia assessed using the Functional Oral Intake Scale (FOIS), Feeding Status Score (FSS), and Eating Assessment Tool (EAT-10) on bedside clinical assessment
- 2. Diagnosis of pneumonia or infection assessed using medical notes
- 3. Weight measured on bedside assessment
- 4. NG tube/PEG in situ
- 5. Quality of life assessed using EQ-VAS/EQ5D5L and Barthel Index (BI) on bedside clinical assessment
- 6. Level of consciousness using the Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS)
- 7. Cognition assessments (MoCA, TICS, MMSE, semantic verbal fluency, phonemic verbal fluency, IQCODE)
- 8. Penetration Aspiration Score (PAS)

Measured on Day 90, Day 180 and Day 365 - all data collected via telephone assessment:

- 1. Dysphagia assessed using DSRS, FOIS, EAT-10
- 2. Feeding status assessed using FSS
- 3. Home-time measured in number of days participant has spent at home since stroke
- 4. Dependency assessed using modified Rankin Scale (mRS)
- 5. Disability assessed using Barthel Index (BI)
- 6. Quality of life assessed using EQ5D5L/EQVAS
- 7. Cognition assessed using Telephone interview for Cognitive Status (TICS)
- 8. Mood assessed using Zung depression scale
- 9. Disposition where the participant has been discharged to home, home with relatives, care home, residential home, nursing home, rehab unit

Measured on Day 365:

1. All-cause mortality - data collected from GP to establish whether participant has died

Previous secondary outcome measures:

Measured on Day 7:

- 1. Stimulation threshold assessed on bedside assessment
- 2. Tolerability of stimulation assessed on bedside assessment
- 3. Record of current used as recorded in medical notes
- 4. Number of catheters used as recorded in medical notes

Measured on Day 14:

- 1. Dysphagia assessed using the Dysphagia Severity Rating Scale (DSRS), Functional Oral Intake Scale (FOIS), Eating Assessment Tool (EAT-10) on bedside clinical assessment
- 2. Feeding status assessed using FSS on bedside clinical assessment
- 3. Diagnosis of pneumonia or infection assessed using medical notes
- 4. Weight measured on bedside assessment
- 5. NG tube/PEG in situ/feeding status recorded using FSS from medical notes

- 6. Quality of life assessed using EQ-VAS/EQ5D5L on bedside clinical assessment
- 7. Discharge/death, data collected from the medical notes on discharge
- 8. Length of stay measured in number of days from admission to discharge
- 9. Swallowing therapy contact time measured in minutes spent with participant
- 10. Time to removal of NG tube/PEG length of time participant has NG/PEG in situ measured in days
- 11. ICU admission measured in number of days spent in ITU
- 12. Discharged with PEG answer yes/no if participant discharged with PEG
- 13. Disposition where the participant has been discharged to home, home with relatives, care home, residential home, nursing home, rehab unit

Measured on Day 90 - all data collected via telephone assessment:

- 1. Dysphagia assessed using DSRS, FOIS, EAT-10
- 2. Feeding status assessed using FSS
- 3. Home-time measured in number of days participant has spent at home since stroke
- 4. Dependency assessed using modified Rankin Scale (mRS)
- 5. Disability assessed using Barthel Index (BI)
- 6. Quality of life assessed using (EQ5D5L/EQVAS)
- 7. Cognition assessed using Telephone interview for Cognitive Status (TICS)
- 8. Mood assessed using Zung depression scale
- 9. Disposition where the participant has been discharged to home, home with relatives, care home, residential home, nursing home, rehab unit

Measured on Day 365:

1. All-cause mortality - data collected from GP to establish whether participant has died

Completion date

30/09/2027

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Current inclusion criteria as of 14/11/2023:

- 1. Hospitalised adults (age ≥18 years)
- 2. Recent (4-31 days) ischaemic or haemorrhagic anterior or posterior circulation stroke (as diagnosed clinico-radiologically) at a comprehensive or primary care stroke centre
- 3. Clinical dysphagia defined as a functional oral intake scale score of 1 (nothing by mouth, feeding by nasogastric tube [NGT]/percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy [PEG] tube), 2 (tube dependent with minimal attempts of food or liquids) or 3 (tube dependent with consistent oral intake of food or liquids)
- 4. NIHSS item 1a score of 0, 1 or 2 (where the patient requires repeated stimulation to arouse)

Previous inclusion criteria:

- 1. Hospitalised adults (age ≥18 years)
- 2. Recent (4-31 days) ischaemic or haemorrhagic anterior or posterior circulation stroke (as diagnosed clinico-radiologically) at a comprehensive or primary care stroke centre
- 3. Clinical dysphagia defined as a functional oral intake scale score of 1 (nothing by mouth, feeding by nasogastric tube [NGT]/percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy [PEG] tube) or 2 (tube dependent with minimal attempts of food or liquids)

Participant type(s)

Patient

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Mixed

Lower age limit

18 years

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

Current exclusion criteria as of 14/11/2023:

- 1. Non-stroke dysphagia, e.g. due to traumatic brain haemorrhage, subarachnoid haemorrhage, brain tumour, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, severe dementia, head or neck cancer
- 2. Pre-stroke dysphagia or dependency (modified Rankin scale, mRS 4/5)
- 3. NIHSS item 1a score of 2 (where the patient only responds to pain) or NIHSS item 1a score of 3
- 4. Ongoing or anticipated ventilation/intubation/tracheostomy
- 5. Ongoing treatment of dysphagia with other forms of electrical / magnetic stimulation e.g. NMES, TCDS, rTMS
- 6. Malignant middle cerebral artery syndrome (although this typically presents before 4 days)
- 7. Pacemaker, cochlear implant or implantable cardioverter-defibrillator
- 8. Need for >35% of oxygen
- 9. Patient expected to be repatriated to a separate organisation
- 10. Patient expected to be rehabilitated at a separate organisation
- 11. Patient not likely to be in the treating hospital for at least 14 days
- 12. Two or more NGT tubes pulled out unless nasal bridle in place
- 13. Investigator feels patient will not tolerate PES catheter
- 14. Expected to be discharged or transferred to a site not running the trial during the PES treatment period
- 15. Pregnancy if known at time of enrolment
- 16. Participating in another randomised controlled treatment trial for post-stroke dysphagia
- 17. Palliative care

Previous exclusion criteria:

- 1. Non-stroke dysphagia, e.g., due to traumatic brain haemorrhage, subarachnoid haemorrhage, brain tumour, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, severe dementia, head or neck cancer
- 2. Pre-stroke dysphagia or dependency (modified Rankin scale [mRS] 4/5)
- 3. Ongoing or anticipated ventilation/intubation/tracheostomy or use of electrical or magnetic stimulation
- 4. Malignant middle cerebral artery syndrome
- 5. Pregnant
- 6. Pacemaker

- 7. Need for >2 litres of oxygen
- 8. Two or more NGT pulled out unless nasal bridle in place
- 9. Investigator feels the patient will not tolerate PES catheter

Date of first enrolment

30/05/2022

Date of final enrolment

30/11/2024

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Northern Ireland

Scotland

Wales

Austria

Denmark

Germany

Study participating centre Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

Foresterhill Road Aberdeen United Kingdom AB25 2ZN

Study participating centre Royal United Hospital

Combe Park Bath United Kingdom BA1 3NG

Study participating centre

Royal Victoria Hospital

274 Grosvenor Road Belfast United Kingdom BT12 6BA

Study participating centre Royal Derby Hospital

Uttoxeter Road Derby United Kingdom DE22 3NE

Study participating centre The Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Gayton Road King's Lynn United Kingdom PE30 4ET

Study participating centre Royal London Hospital

Whitechapel Road Whitechapel London United Kingdom E1 1BB

Study participating centre St George's Hospital

Blackshaw Road London United Kingdom SW17 0QT

Study participating centre Luton and Dunstable University Hospital

Lewsey Road Luton United Kingdom LU4 0DZ

Study participating centre Queens Medical Centre

Nottingham University Hospital Derby Road Nottingham United Kingdom NG7 2UH

Study participating centre Salford Royal Hospital

Stott Lane Eccles Salford United Kingdom M6 8HD

Study participating centre Southampton General Hospital

Tremona Road Southampton United Kingdom SO16 6YD

Study participating centre Stepping Hill Hospital

Stockport NHS Foundation Trust Poplar Grove Hazel Grove Stockport United Kingdom SK2 7JE

Study participating centre Royal Stoke University Hospital

Newcastle Road Stoke-on-trent United Kingdom ST4 6QG

Study participating centre Sunderland Royal Hospital

Kayll Road Sunderland United Kingdom SR4 7TP

Study participating centre Musgrove Park Hospital (taunton)

Musgrove Park Hospital Taunton United Kingdom TA1 5DA

Study participating centre Warrington Hospital (site)

Warrington Hospital Lovely Lane Warrington United Kingdom **WA5 1QG**

Study participating centre Royal Bournemouth General Hospital

Castle Lane East Bournemouth United Kingdom **BH7 7DW**

Study participating centre Fairfield General Hospital

Fairfield General Hospital Rochdale Old Road Bury United Kingdom BL9 7TD

Study participating centre King's Mill Hospital

Mansfield Road

Mansfield United Kingdom NG17 4JL

Study participating centre University Hospital Llandough

Penlan Road Llandough Penarth United Kingdom CF64 2XX

Study participating centre Dorset County Hospital

Dorset County Hospital Williams Avenue Dorchester United Kingdom DT1 2JY

Study participating centre Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh at Little France

51 Little France Crescent Old Dalkeith Road Edinburgh Lothian United Kingdom EH16 4SA

Study participating centre Leeds General Infirmary

Great George Street Leeds United Kingdom LS1 3EX

Study participating centre West Suffolk Hospital

Hardwick Lane

Bury St. Edmunds United Kingdom IP33 2QZ

Study participating centre Leighton Hospital

Leighton Crewe United Kingdom CW1 4QJ

Study participating centre Ninewells Hospital

Ninewells Avenue Dundee United Kingdom DD1 9SY

Sponsor information

Organisation

University of Nottingham

ROR

https://ror.org/01ee9ar58

Funder(s)

Funder type

Government

Funder Name

Health Technology Assessment Programme

Alternative Name(s)

NIHR Health Technology Assessment Programme, Health Technology Assessment (HTA), HTA

Funding Body Type

Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype

National government

Location

United Kingdom

Funder Name

Phagenesis Ltd

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are/will be available upon request from PhEAST@nottingham.ac.uk addressed to the Trial Manager.

IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
HRA research summary			28/06/2023		No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes
Protocol file	version 2.0	02/12/2021	15/03/2022	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes