

Eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties



A Speech and Language Therapist has looked at
your swallow.

They found that you have swallowing difficulties.
This is called **Dysphagia**.



This leaflet gives you information and advice
about Dysphagia.

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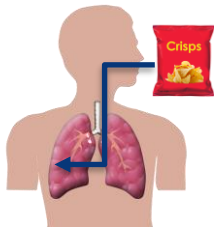


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Swallowing difficulties and your health



Swallowing difficulties cause coughing or choking during or after eating and drinking. Food and drink can go into your lungs. This is called aspiration.



If a swallowing difficulty is not treated you can get other health problems. This can make you sick.

Examples of other health problems.



- **Chest infections and pneumonia**

Pneumonia is a swelling in the lungs. Part of the lung fills up with fluid.



- **Choking**

Choking is when you cannot breathe because your airway is blocked.



- **Dehydration**

Dehydration is when you do not have enough water in your body



- **Poor nutrition**

Poor nutrition is when you do not get the food you need to be healthy and grow.



You can live well with swallowing difficulties. Doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and dietitians can help you.



Who can have swallowing difficulties



People with swallowing difficulties find it hard to swallow some food or drink.

Some people can not swallow at all

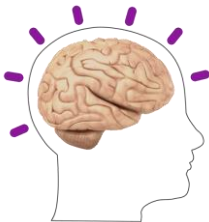


People of all ages can have swallowing difficulties.

Older people can have more swallowing difficulties. Swallowing can be harder for them.



Most people have a swallowing difficulties because they have another health problem.



Some of these health problems change the brain. This can change your swallow.

For example

- Stroke
- Dementia
- Parkinson's
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Motor Neurone Disease
- Brain Injury
- Cerebral Palsy

Other health problems that can change your swallow include

- Some types of cancer
- Some surgeries, to the mouth or throat
- Some chest or breathing problems
- Physical difficulties





Signs of a swallowing difficulty



- ☐ Coughing or choking when you eat or drink. Or just after you eat or drink.



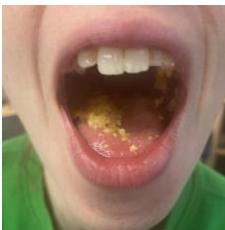
- ☐ A change to how your voice sounds when eating or drinking. For example, a gurgly or wet voice.



- ☐ A change in your breathing when eating or drinking. For example, sounding wheezy or breathing fast.



- ☐ Pain when you swallow. Getting tired or needing to work hard to swallow.



- ☐ Food left behind in your mouth after eating.



- Having lots of chest infections or pneumonia when you do not have a cold.



- Avoiding food or drinks that you find hard to swallow.



Choking dangers

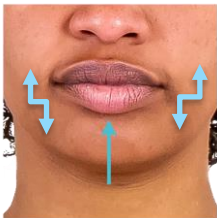


Some people choke because of the way they eat and drink. For example

☐ Eating or drinking very quickly.



☐ Putting too much food in your mouth.



☐ Not chewing your food enough.



☐ Holding food in your mouth.



☐ Talking or laughing when you eat or drink.



☐ Walking, moving or lying down when you eat or drink.



☐ Not paying attention when you eat or drink because it is noisy.



Who can help



Speech and Language Therapists

- Can see if you have an eating, drinking and swallowing problem.
- Can give you information and advice to help you swallow more safely. These are called **recommendations**.



Dietitians

- Help you get the food and drink you need to stay healthy.



Physiotherapists

- Help you get into the right position to eat and drink.
- Help keep your chest clear.



Occupational Therapists

- Give advice about special seats and equipment to help you eat and drink.



Pharmacists

- They can help if your medication is hard to swallow.

Never cut or crush tablets, open capsules or thicken medicines without advice from your pharmacist or GP.



Carers or family members

- They can help make your food or drinks
- They can support you to eat and drink.



Doctors

- They can help you with your health and ask other health professionals to see you.



What you can do



You can help yourself

☐ Follow the advice you are given. This means listen and do all the things you are told might help.



☐ If your swallow changes tell your Speech and Language Therapist, a Doctor or a healthcare professional.



☐ Keep your mouth clean. Brush, floss and visit the dentist. If you wear dentures keep them clean. If you have no teeth it is still important to clean your mouth.



☐ Eat a healthy balanced diet.



☐ Share your swallow recommendations and take them with you wherever you go. This helps people who support you to keep you safe.



☐ Bring swallow recommendations with you if you
✓ go into hospital
✓ go home from hospital
✓ move to another ward, hospital or care setting
✓ go to a day care centre



☐ Speak to your Speech and Language Therapist
- if you find it difficult to understand the recommendation sheet
- or if you want to change the recommendations.



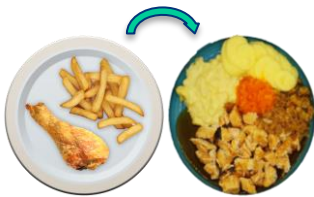
Recommendation Sheet



Your Speech and Language Therapist will give you an eating, drinking and swallowing recommendation sheet.



Recommendation sheets are important. They give the best advice to help you swallow safely.



They will tell you how to change food and drink to make your swallow safe.

You will be given information to explain any food or drink changes.



They will tell you if need support and help to eat and drink safely. Or if you need someone to stay with you when you eat and drink.



They will give you other advice to help your eating and drinking.

For example

- Changes to your medications.
- Equipment that could help.
- How to sit when you eat and drink.
- Good changes to your environment.
- Swallow exercises to help your swallow.





Information for family and carers



- ☐ Before Food and Drink, **stop** and **think!**



- ☐ Always ask staff or a Speech and Language Therapist before sharing, giving or sending in food, drinks or snacks.



- ☐ Follow the advice on the recommendations sheet.



- ☐ Do not offer food or drink that is not recommended. This is dangerous.



- ☐ Share the recommendations with everyone who needs to know.



Where you can find more information



The Public Health Agency NI Dysphagia Homepage



Eating, Drinking and Swallowing Difficulty video



The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI)

Information about IDDSI levels. These tell you about changes to food texture and thickness of drinks.



Stop Choking Website



Signs of Swallowing Difficulty Checklist



Swallow Awareness E-learning

Free, online Swallow Awareness training



Contact Information



Contact your Speech and Language Therapist or a Healthcare Professional

- if there is any change in your eating, drinking or swallowing
- if you are worried
- if you have any questions.



Your local speech and Language Therapy Team

Place

Contact Number

Produced for the Public Health Agency

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