



Improving experience for customers with swallowing difficulties (dysphagia)

Top tips for hospitality

Some people have difficulty eating, drinking or swallowing. This is also known as 'dysphagia'. This can affect their quality of life as socialising in restaurants, cafes and pubs may be stressful, challenging and potentially unsafe.



Eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties can affect people with a range of medical conditions, including cancer, dementia, mental health conditions, Parkinson's and learning disabilities, and it can affect children, young people and adults. People who live with dysphagia are at higher risk of food or drink going into the airway, excessive coughing, chest infections and choking.

In the hospitality sector, you can play a vital role in improving quality of life for people who have eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties and we would like your help. When your customer has a good experience they will tell others and come back again!

Help improve the experience for people with swallowing difficulties



Consider offering alternative seating arrangements, such as a quiet corner or table with fewer distractions.

When a customer lets you know their requirements in advance, consider offering a longer booking slot as some people may need more time to finish their meal.

FOOD ALLERGEN ICONS



When asking about specific needs such as allergens, include swallowing difficulties in this. For example, “Do you have any allergies or swallowing difficulties?”



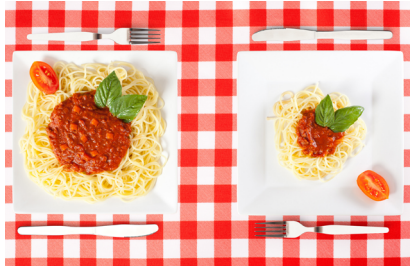
Answer specific questions, like ‘could the dish be mashed easily’? This will help the customer decide what they can eat.



Where possible, offer a variety of dishes on the main menu and the children’s menu, for example creamed potato, fish in sauce or rice dishes. Consider offering to blend food if requested.



Some customers may have specific requirements that will make it easier for them to eat and enjoy their food. This may include the need for extra sauce or gravy with their food or extra water to accompany their meal.



Some customers with eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties may need smaller portions or may request a starter as a main course.



Be aware that customers may need to bring some of their own specialist equipment such as cups, cutlery, bowls or plates.



Some people may need to add a thickening powder to their drinks. They may ask for cutlery to help them to do this.



Always check when the food is served if your customer needs any further assistance.



Encourage happy customers to provide feedback.

Customer feedback

“My swallowing difficulty is not obvious but it has a huge impact on my life especially when it comes to social occasions.” **Sarah**

“It’s hard to find something on a children’s menu which is suitable for my wee boy to eat when we are out.” **Gemma**

“My local restaurant know me now, I don’t feel judged when I ask for a smaller portion or extra gravy to go with my dinner.” **Graham**

For more information, click on the images or follow the QR codes below:

- Do you have eating, drinking or swallowing difficulties? booklet



- Dysphagia on the Public Health Agency website



We would love to hear your feedback on this factsheet.
Please complete the form at:

<https://forms.office.com/e/NUP4ifaK7s>



Universal swallow awareness training

<https://cec.hscni.net/learningcontent/universal-swallow-awareness>



Public Health Agency
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

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