

# Dysphagia

Dysphagia is the medical condition for having difficulty swallowing. Some people with dysphagia have problems swallowing certain foods or liquids, while others cannot swallow at all. Over time, dysphagia can also cause symptoms such as weight loss and repeated chest infections which can lead to hospital admissions.

## Why does dysphagia happen?

Dysphagia is usually caused by another health condition, such as:

- a condition affecting the nervous system - such as a stroke, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Motor Neurone Disease, a head injury or Dementia
- cancer - such as mouth cancer or oesophageal cancer
- gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD), where stomach acid leaks back up into the oesophagus (the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach)

## What signs and symptoms should I be aware of?

- coughing and spluttering when eating and drinking
- shortness of breath or a tight chest after swallowing
- a high temperature
- pouching in cheek
- hoarse/wet voice after swallowing
- coughing up yellow or green phlegm
- feeling tired and generally unwell
- bringing food back up, sometimes through the nose
- a sensation that food is stuck in the throat or chest
- recurrent chest infections

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## To make eating and drinking safer:

- sit upright with 90 degree angle at hips, knees and feet, at a table is best
- do not eat or drink when slouched or lying down
- take small bites of food
- take small sips of fluid
- do not gulp drinks
- eat slowly
- chew foods well before swallowing
- make sure you have swallowed your food or drink before taking more
- do not wash down your food with drinks
- do not talk when you have food in your mouth
- reduce distractions at mealtime, eg switch the TV off
- always drink from an open cup, avoid using straws or spouts/lids unless advised otherwise
- avoid tipping your head back when drinking, keep your chin down
- ensure you clean your teeth, and/or dentures and gums at least twice a day

If you have any questions regarding this information please contact the Speech & Language Therapy Team on **0151 604 7271** or email **wchc.salt@nhs.net**

If you would like this information in another format or language, please contact the Your Experience Team on freephone 0800 694 5530. Alternatively you can email [wcnt.yourexperience@nhs.net](mailto:wcnt.yourexperience@nhs.net)

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