

Dysphagia and Swallowing Difficulties

A person may need to change the texture and consistency of the foods and fluids they consume if they have swallowing difficulties (also called dysphagia).

Frequent causes of dysphagia:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stroke or traumatic brain injury (TBI)• Parkinson's disease and other neurological degenerative disorders• Multiple sclerosis• Motor neuron disease (eg. amyotrophic lateral sclerosis ALS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Myasthenia gravis• Laryngectomy , pharyngectomy, or esophagectomy• Head and neck surgery (eg. oral cavity cancer)• Cerebral palsy and other movement disorders |
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Signs of swallowing difficulties can/may include:

- Coughing or throat clearing at meals, especially when drinking liquids.
- Build-up of saliva with drooling.
- Food/liquid falling out of the mouth.
- Difficulty moving food around in the mouth.
- Food remaining in the mouth after swallowing.
- Difficulty starting the swallow.
- Food or drink entering the nasal passage.
- Food sticking in the throat.
- A gurgly voice quality.
- Frequent chest infections or pneumonias.

You may also notice:

- Taking a longer time to eat.
- Unintentional weight loss.

General guidelines for eating and drinking more safely:

1. Take smaller bites/sips. (eg. ½ to 1 teaspoon and chew food slowly)
2. Eat small frequent meals instead of three large meals.
3. Eat at times that you are more alert. Make sure there are no distractions (eg. TV) and save your conversation for after the meal.
4. Eat in an upright position.
5. Follow texture and consistency changes recommended for foods and fluids as suggested by your Speech Language Pathologist and/or Registered Dietitian.
6. Follow each meal with oral cleaning to prevent mouth sores and to avoid swallowing unchewed food that may still be in your mouth.
7. If you have trouble swallowing pills, grind them with a pill crusher and mix them with applesauce or pudding (Ask your doctor/pharmacist whether this is appropriate as Slow-release medications should not be crushed). Another alternative is to ask your pharmacist whether your medication comes in liquid form that could be taken alone or added to food/beverages.