

WHAT IS DYSPHAGIA?

Dysphagia is the medical term for swallowing difficulties. These can include difficulties swallowing certain types of food and drink, difficulties chewing and moving food through the mouth, difficulties triggering a swallow and difficulties swallowing saliva resulting in drooling.

WHAT ARE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DYSPHAGIA?

People who have dysphagia are more at risk of aspiration and choking. People with dysphagia can also experience unintentional weight loss which can lead to malnutrition and dehydration.

WHAT IS ASPIRATION?

Aspiration occurs when food and / or drink enters the airway. This is often described as 'going down the wrong way' and can result in coughing and / or throat clearing. Aspiration can cause chest infections and pneumonia.

WHAT IS CHOKING?

Choking occurs when the breathing pattern is obstructed by something lodged in the throat. In severe cases the person may be unable to speak or breathe and could become unconscious.

SIGNS OF DYSPHAGIA AND POTENTIAL ASPIRATION

- Coughing or choking.
- Change of colour (pale or red-faced).
- Breathlessness / gasping / change in breathing pattern.
- Rapid heart rate / pain in the chest.
- Grimacing.
- Eye watering.
- Wet or gurgly voice.
- Food lodged in cheeks and mouth after eating.
- Poor chewing of solid food with food 'going round and round'.
- Drooling and dribbling.

HOW IS DYSPHAGIA TREATED?

Treatment usually depends on the cause and type of dysphagia. Treatments may include:

- Changing the consistency of food and drinks to make them safer and easier to swallow
- Advice on positioning and feeding.
- Therapy to improve swallowing ability.
- Advice on alternative forms of nutrition, such as tube feeding through the nose or stomach.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DYSPHAGIA?

- Follow advice given by the speech therapist or hospital regarding food and drink textures. Ensure an upright posture when eating and drinking.
- Keep distractions to a minimum e.g. turn off TV/radio.
- Avoid talking and eating at the same time.
- Avoid overfilling the mouth with food and make sure mouth is clear before next mouthful.
- Eat in a relaxed manner; avoid rushing.
- Make sure the mouth is clear after each meal and remove any food that has collected in the cheeks. Use a toothbrush to clean the mouth and get rid of any nasty bacteria.
- Fortify foods when there are concerns about weight loss. A referral to the dietician may be required if a large amount of weight is lost very quickly.

**PLEASE NOTE WE DO NOT RUN AN OUT OF HOURS OR WEEKEND SERVICE.
PLEASE CALL NHS 111 OR AN AMBULANCE IF IT IS AN EMERGENCY.**

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