

Dysphagia: Difficulty Swallowing Key Points



Telephone: 0300 125 5550

Email: sirona.neuro@nhs.net

What is dysphagia?

Dysphagia is a fancy word for swallowing problems. It can happen due to various conditions like stroke, Parkinson's, or even head and neck cancers.

Swallowing explained:

Swallowing is a complex job involving many muscles and nerves working together to move food from your mouth to your stomach. If these muscles weaken or movements become uncoordinated, dysphagia can occur. This can cause food or drink to go the wrong way, into your lungs. This is called aspiration and can be serious.

Signs of dysphagia:

- Coughing or choking while eating/drinking
- Weight loss
- Watery eyes
- Wheezing while eating/drinking
- Fevers or feeling chesty
- Refusing food/drinks
- Taking a long time to finish meals
- Wet or gurgly voice while eating/drinking
- Feeling a lump in the throat
- Food bits left in the mouth after eating

Who can help?

Speech and Language Therapists are experts in swallowing problems. They will assess the strength and coordination of your mouth and throat

muscles, and how you swallow. They may watch you eat and drink different textures to see how you manage.

Treatment for dysphagia:

- **Modified diet and fluids:** Your therapist might recommend changing the thickness or texture of your food and drinks to make swallowing safer. These are described by international standards called IDDSI levels (you can learn more at [Link to IDDSI website](#))
- **Exercises/positions:** Special exercises or positioning while eating can sometimes help improve swallowing.
- **Thickened fluids:** Sometimes thicker fluids (like smoothies) or thickening products added to drinks might be recommended.
- **Equipment:** Special cups, adapted cutlery, or plate guards may be helpful depending on your needs.

General tips for safe eating and drinking:

- Sit upright, fully awake, and alert.
- Don't eat or drink lying down.
- Minimize distractions like TV or radio.
- Avoid straws and spouted cups.
- Take small bites and sips, and eat slowly.
- Ensure dentures fit well (if you wear them).
- Stay upright for 30 minutes after eating/drinking.
- Avoid high-risk foods like dry, crumbly, chewy, or hard foods if you suspect swallowing problems.

Level 4- Pureed diet



Level 5- Minced and moist



Level 6- Soft and bite sized



The photographs on this page are courtesy of Wiltshire Farm Foods

Maintaining good oral hygiene is crucial!

- Clean your mouth/teeth twice daily, even if you don't have teeth.
- Use a toothbrush and toothpaste if possible.
- Consider low-foaming toothpaste if regular toothpaste is difficult.
- Use artificial saliva products (sprays or gels) if you have a dry mouth.
- Clean your mouth/teeth more often if you experience dry or excessive saliva.

Remember, a Speech and Language Therapist can help assess and manage dysphagia.

Let us know what you think and get involved

Telephone: 0300 124 5300*

Email: sirona.hello@nhs.net

Website: [Link to Sirona website](#)

*Calls from landlines are charged up to 10p per minute; calls from mobiles vary, please check with your network provider. This is not a premium-rate number.

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Registered Office

Sirona care & health CIC,
Badminton Rd Office
2nd Floor, Badminton Rd
Yate
BS37 5AF

Company Number: 07585003



/SironaCIC



@SironaCIC



/SironaCIC



/sirona-care-&-health

