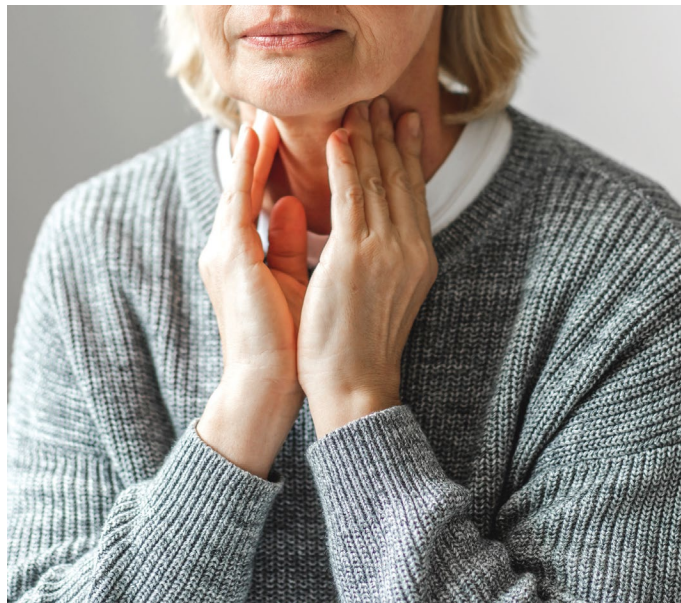


Swallowing Difficulties

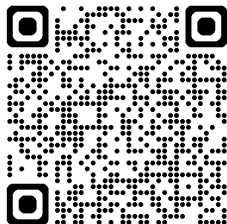
Leaflet



What they are and how to manage them

Telephone: 0300 125 5550

Email: sirona.neuro@nhs.net



Who can help?

Speech and Language Therapists are qualified in the assessment and management of dysphagia. They will check the strength and co-ordination of the muscles in your mouth and throat, as well as your ability to swallow safely. Often they will ask to see you eating and drinking a number of different consistencies, to see how you manage. They may recommend modified food and fluid consistencies or exercises /positions to make swallowing safer.

They may also refer you for further investigations, if what is going on is not clear at an initial visit. For example a dynamic x-ray of your swallowing (this is called a videofluoroscopy).

If the problem is not believed to be in your mouth or throat, but lower down into your oesophagus then the help of an ENT or Gastro team may be enlisted and your Speech Therapist would not have any further involvement.

General advice to support safe eating and drinking

- Ensure sitting as upright as possible and fully awake and alert.
- Do not eat and drink lying down.
- Minimise distractions (e.g. TV/radio).
- Avoid use of straws and spouted beakers.
- Encourage a slowed rate of eating and drinking.
- Encourage small mouthfuls and sips.
- Where applicable ensure dentures are well fitting.
- Remain upright for at least half an hour after eating and drinking.
- Avoid high risk foods if concerned that swallowing may be an issue e.g. very dry, crumbly, chewy, or hard foods.

Management of dysphagia

Management may be by modifying the consistency of Diet and/ or fluids. Diets are described according to international descriptors called IDDSI levels (International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative). You can find out more about IDDSI at www.iddsi.org.

You may be recommended a certain level or advised to avoid certain foods.

Examples of IDDSI levels:

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

Thickened fluids

You may also be recommended thickened fluids. You may manage more naturally thick fluids, such as smoothies or be prescribed a thickening product, which can be added to all your drinks. This does not alter the taste, just the consistency. This is generally prescribed by the GP and your Speech Therapist will advise you on the amount that needs to be added. It is important to follow these instructions closely.

Equipment

Speech Therapists may also suggest equipment that may be beneficial such as specialist cups that only deliver a small sip at a time, or adapted cutlery that makes eating independently a little easier. Plate guards and specialist straws are also items that may be considered.

Positioning/techniques

Speech and Language Therapists may make specific recommendations about your position when eating and drinking.

Techniques may also be advised. For example, a double swallow may be advised if you are prone to residue in the throat or a head turn to your weak side, if you have a weakness following a stroke. Other manoeuvres such as a chin tuck or a head tilt may be considered.

Oral hygiene

Maintaining good oral hygiene is one of the most important things you can do if you have a swallowing difficulty. It can help protect you from dysphagia-related chest infections. Please find some advice about oral hygiene below:

- You should clean your mouth even if you do not have teeth.
- Clean your mouth/teeth at least twice a day.
- Ideally you should use a toothbrush and toothpaste.
- If you find regular toothpaste difficult to manage because of your dysphagia, you can try a low foaming toothpaste (look for a toothpaste that is SLS-free. SLS is the ingredient that creates the foam).
- If you experience a dry mouth you may benefit from artificial saliva products such as a spray or a gel. Your Speech Therapist or GP can advise on this.
- If you experience a dry mouth OR excess saliva, you may need to clean your mouth/teeth
- more often.

You may also be advised to consider mouth care or brushing your teeth after meals if you are prone to oral residue.

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.

This document can be provided in other formats and languages, please contact us for more information.

Date of creation: 12/2024

Date for review: 12/2026

URN: 0040

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

