

Advice for people with possible Oesophageal Dysphagia / lower stage swallowing difficulties

You have contacted the Speech and Language Therapy department because you are concerned about a resident who is experiencing difficulties swallowing.

Speech and Language Therapists are experts in the assessment and management of oropharyngeal dysphagia (the upper part of swallowing in your mouth and top of throat).

The symptoms you have identified are likely related to **the lower part of the swallowing process (Oesophageal stage)**. The resident may already have had gastro-oesophageal investigations and a diagnosis of oesophageal stage difficulties.

Speech and Language Therapists are not able to support with this part of the swallow process and we suggest that your medical team consider a referral to another specialist service.

Gastroenterology or the Upper Gastro-Intestinal Team are the specialists who examine the oesophagus and stomach. There are specific tests for oesophageal dysphagia **if** they feel a referral is appropriate.

Symptoms of oesophageal difficulties may include:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- A 'sticking' sensation when eating or drinking.
- Discomfort when eating
- Coughing when eating
- Regurgitation (food coming back up)
- Heartburn
- Bad breath and / or unpleasant taste in mouth
- Persistent irritable cough or need to throat clear.
- Weight Loss

The following foods / drinks may be more comfortable to eat and drink:

- Choose naturally soft, moist food (add sauces such as gravy, tomato ketchup, mayonnaise, white sauce, cream, custard for extra moisture)
- Mash or liquidise food.
- Be careful with bread and tough meats. Try sandwiches with soft fillings and cut off crusts. Watch for bread becoming stodgy and difficult to clear. Bread dipped in soup may be easier.
- Aim to reduce the following food types since they can often trigger difficulties.

- acidic foods such as citrus fruits and tomatoes
- acidic drinks such as fruit juice
- alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes

These strategies may help when eating and drinking:

- Encourage an extra swallow of saliva in between each mouthful.
- Try taking small sips of drink between mouthfuls of food.
- Some residents feel that sparkling water / carbonated drinks can help when sipped throughout the meal.
- Eating slowly and taking small mouthfuls.
- Eating smaller meals more frequently throughout the day.
- Chewing the food well before swallowing.
- Sitting upright when eating and stay sitting upright for approximately 30 minutes after meals.
- Don't eat late in the evening. Try to eat 2 hours before bed.
- Don't eat immediately before exercise.
- Make sure you keep teeth and mouth clean so brush teeth / clean dentures regularly.

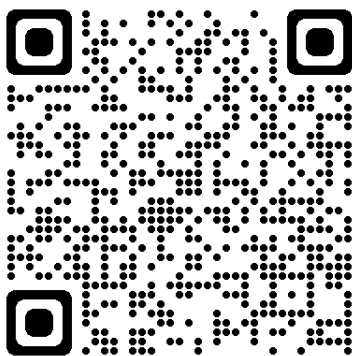
Maximising your nutrition:

- If the person is losing weight unintentionally, try fortifying meals to add in extra calories:

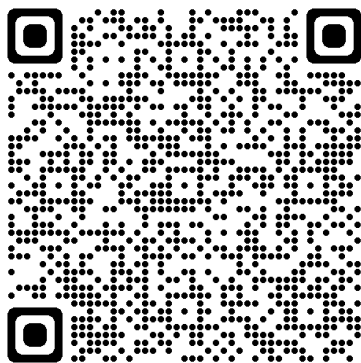
Fortifying food	
Add butter, olive oil or mayonnaise to sandwiches salad or potatoes.	These approaches will increase the calories and protein in each serving of the meals, without needing to increase the portion size.
Choose full fat milk, cream, cheese and full sugar foods.	
Add cheese to soups, mashed potato, curry and pasta dishes, scrambled egg.	
Add cream or condensed milk to puddings.	
Add extra 'skimmed milk powder' to full fat milk to further increase nutrition. Use this milk on cereal, in puddings and hot drinks and soups/mashed potato.	Add four tablespoons of skimmed milk powder to one pint of full cream milk. You can buy skimmed milk powder at most supermarkets.

Aim to offer more frequent, but smaller meals every two to three hours.

- Puddings are useful to add extra calories. These can be eaten with the meal or in-between meals.
- Complan and Meritene shakes, or soups are a good way of improving the energy and protein intake. Offer them between meals to avoid them filling the person up at mealtimes. They are available to buy from both supermarkets and pharmacies.
- Monitor their weight and seek further health professional advice if needed. You may find this link useful to help you identify if you need more support - <https://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/patients-association-nutrition-checklist>



You may also find this Sirona information useful - <https://www.sirona-cic.org.uk/advice-information/leaflet-library/nutrition-and-dietetics/malnutrition/>



- A referral to dietetics may be required. Please discuss this with your GP Practice.

This leaflet is modified with thanks from that produced by Speech and Language Therapy Department / Gastroenterology Department / Nutrition and Dietetics Department at Royal Bournemouth Hospital

Produced by Sirona Adult Neuro Speech and Language Therapy Team and DANS.

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