



North Somerset

Working In Partnership



Dysphagia





What is Dysphagia?

People may have difficulty when they swallow and sometimes it hurts. This may be when they just swallow saliva or eat food or drink. Occasionally people are unable to swallow at all.



What is aspiration?

This is when food or drink enters the airway.

This can get caught in the lungs and lead to:

- chest infections
- choking
- death



Who is affected?

Anyone can be affected but many of them have learning disabilities.



What can go wrong in the mouth?

- Food can fall from the mouth
- Dribbling
- pieces of food are left in the mouth after swallowing
- difficulty in using the tongue
- food coming out of the nose
- keeping food in the mouth for a long time



What can go wrong in the throat?

- food going into the throat before swallowing starts
- airway not closing and food going into the lungs
- food left in the throat after swallowing
- unable to dislodge the stuck food.



Warning signs to look for:

- coughing and choking
- difficulty chewing food
- difficulty keeping food in the mouth
- "wet" breath / gurgling sounds
- refusal/ reluctance to eat / drink
- inability to manage saliva
- recurrent vomiting
- food coming out of the mouth or nose after swallowing
- difficulty to swallowing
- recurrent chest infections
- loss of weight (sudden or gradual)
- poor oral hygiene
- long mealtimes
- distress when eating
- storing food in the mouth



How do we swallow?

Swallowing is a difficult process, which uses lots of muscles and nerves to move food from the mouth to the stomach.

We swallow in 5 stages:

1) Pre-Oral Stage

Thinking about food, watering mouth and putting food to your mouth

2) Oral Preparatory Stage

The tongue moves the food around for chewing. Chewing makes it the right size and helps to mix with saliva to make swallowing easier.

3) Oral Stage

The tongue collects the food or drink and makes it ready for swallowing

4) Pharyngeal Stage

The tongue pushes the food or drink to the back of the mouth, which makes you swallow and the food passes into the tube between the mouth and oesophagus. The voice box closes tightly, you stop breathing to stop the food or drink entering the lungs.

5) Oesophageal Stage

The food goes to the Oesophagus tube, which takes it to the stomach. This process normally takes around 3 seconds.



How does Dysphagia happen?

When there is a problem with any part of the swallowing process.

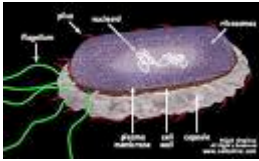
Sometimes a weak tongue or cheek muscles may make it hard to move food around in the mouth for chewing.



Pieces of food that is too large for swallowing may enter the throat and block the passage or air.

Other problems include not being able to start the swallowing reflex.

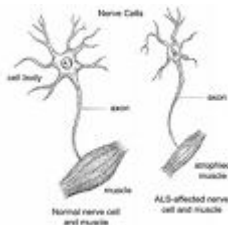
What are some of the problems caused by Dysphagia?



It can be very serious. Someone who cannot swallow well may not be able to eat enough of the right foods to stay healthy and keep a good weight.

Food and liquid may enter the lungs and this may cause harmful bacteria to grow. A serious infection can result (Aspiration Pneumonia).

What causes Dysphagia?



It has many causes. Any illness that weakens the muscles and nerves used for swallowing may cause dysphagia. For example people with diseases of the nervous system, such as cerebral palsy or parkinson's disease often have problems swallowing. Also strokes or head injuries may affect the swallowing muscles or limit the sensation in the mouth and throat.



What you should do?



Make sure the person is sitting upright



Think about where you are when giving food and drink.



Minimise distractions



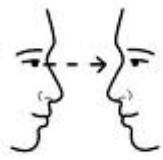
Have everything you need close by



Explain what is on the plate / in the cup



Use the most suitable utensils



Gain eye contact



Be positive about food and drink



Look for when the person is ready for the next mouthful



Look for tiredness



Look out for swallowing difficulty



Have a good communication with the staff team

Ensure good oral hygiene



But do NOT!!!



Give food and drink to someone who is lying down



Overload the spoon / fork



Give too big a sip of fluid



Feed too fast



Be negative about the food and drink



Ignore any advice that has been agreed with the staff team



If you think someone may have an eating or drinking problem then please contact their Doctor or if urgent call 999