



## Speech and Language Therapy

# Dysphagia

## Patient Information Leaflet

### What is dysphagia?

- Dysphagia is the medical term used to describe difficulties with eating, drinking, and swallowing.
- Dysphagia can cause food, drink, and medication to “go down the wrong way” and into the lungs, rather than into the stomach.
- This is called ‘aspiration’. If food or drink gets into the lungs it can cause coughing or choking and may lead to a chest infection/pneumonia. This is called ‘aspiration pneumonia’ and can lead to serious medical complications, and in some cases, death.
- A Speech and Language Therapist will assess your swallow function (how you swallow food and drink) and give you suggestions that will help your swallowing.

### What about medication?

- The way you take your medications may need to be changed if you are finding it difficult to swallow. Some medications can be crushed or given in liquid form, making them easier to swallow. Ask your GP or pharmacist before changing how you take your medications.

### What about mouthcare?

- Brush your teeth, tongue, and gums at least twice a day, especially after meals.
- Swallowing saliva containing bacteria from the mouth can lead to infections. You are advised to use a low foaming toothpaste (e.g. Sensodyne or Biotene) as this does not create lots of saliva (spit) or leave the mouth dry.



## General tips to help with eating and drinking

- Make sure you are sitting upright whenever eating or drinking.
- Sit upright for 20 minutes after you finish eating or drinking.
- Reduce distractions when eating or drinking.
- Avoid eating and drinking if you are breathless or drowsy.
- Eat and drink at a slow pace.

## Things to look out for when eating and drinking

- Coughing, choking or throat clearing during or shortly after eating or drinking.
- A wet or 'gurgly' sounding voice during or shortly after eating or drinking.
- Breathlessness or fatigue during or after a meal.
- Increased drooling or saliva (spit).
- Increased effort when eating/drinking or holding food or fluid in the mouth.
- Food or drink remaining in the mouth after swallowing.
- Food sticking in the throat (or a feeling of a lump).
- Chest infections or aspiration pneumonia.

**Contact your Doctor or Speech and Language Therapist if you notice any of the above.**

**Speech & Language Therapy Team: 0207 288 5546**



### Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or [whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net)

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please email [whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net). We will try our best to meet your needs.

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