

Dysphagia (swallowing problems)

This leaflet provides information about swallowing problems, also known as dysphagia, as well as the causes and the signs you should look out for.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your speech and language therapist or GP.

What is dysphagia?

Many people have problems with eating, drinking and swallowing. The medical term for this is dysphagia. Some people with dysphagia have problems swallowing certain foods, liquids or saliva. It can occur in varying degrees ranging from mild discomfort or difficulty, to a complete inability to swallow. Specialist dysphagia assessment and advice is provided by speech and language therapists.

What are the causes?

Dysphagia can result from a wide variety of medical conditions, including acute or progressive neurological conditions, trauma, disease, or as a result of surgery and/or medical treatments.

What are some of the problems that may be linked to dysphagia?

Below are examples of some of the types of problems that may be linked to dysphagia. However, everyone is different, so your experience will be individual to you. It is best to speak to your speech and language therapist about your problems and how to manage them.

- Swallowing problems may lead to food and drink entering the airway instead of the stomach. In some cases this may lead to the development of a chest infection.
- Swallowing problems may make it difficult for you to eat enough to maintain your weight and good health.
- Swallowing problems may make it difficult for you to drink enough fluids which can lead to other complications such as constipation or dehydration.
- You may experience reduced enjoyment of eating and drinking, which may impact on your quality of life.

How to recognise the signs and symptoms

Below are some of the signs and symptoms that you may have dysphagia:

- Extra effort or time needed to chew or swallow.
- Food or liquid leaking from the mouth.
- Coughing or choking during or immediately after eating or drinking.
- Wet or 'gurgly' sounding voice during or after eating or drinking.
- Food sticking in your throat which is difficult to get down.
- Repeated chest infections, chesty cough or high temperatures.
- Weight loss or dehydration from not being able to eat or drink enough.

What should I do next?

If you notice any of the signs or symptoms listed above or any changes to your swallowing once you are home, please contact your speech and language therapist or your GP.

Who will support me once I am home?

If necessary, we may refer you to community speech and language therapy services for ongoing support. If we have referred you, the contact details for your community contact will be completed below.

Community speech and language therapy contact details:

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If further speech and language therapy is not indicated in the box above, but you have had any further difficulties, please contact your GP.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department on **020 7188 6233** (Guy's) or **020 7188 6246** (St Thomas') Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm.

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

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