

Mealtime Management & Dysphagia

An introduction to Dysphagia

Dysphagia is the medical term for swallowing disorder.

Swallowing is something we do hundreds of times a day. We swallow when we eat and when we drink, but we also swallow our saliva – often without even thinking about it.

Difficulties with swallowing can lead to serious health issues such as aspiration pneumonia (chest infection caused by food, drink or saliva being swallowed into the lungs), malnutrition, dehydration and choking.

Safe swallowing requires good coordination of multiple sensory messages and muscles.

Signs of swallowing difficulties

Signs of swallowing difficulties may include:

- Choking and gagging;
- Unexplained or frequent chest infections;
- Coughing during or after meals, snacks and drinks;
- Food remaining in the mouth after eating;
- Voice changes after eating such as a raspy, gravelly or gurgly sounding voice;
- Face changes during eating such as watering eyes and pained appearance;
- Vomiting or reflux;
- Frequent throat clearing;
- Difficulty keeping food or fluids in the mouth;
- Refusal to eat or drink;
- Difficulty managing saliva.

Assessment

We can complete adult and paediatric assessments for feeding and swallowing disorders:

- **At our dysphagia clinics** – currently running at selected NeuroRehab Allied Health Network clinics.
- **At our videofluoroscopy clinics** – currently offered at local radiology clinics.
- **In your home**, including Specialist Disability Accommodation and Aged Care Facilities.
- **At your Day Program.**



Supporting people at mealtimes

If you think someone is having difficulty swallowing you should request a swallowing assessment by a Speech Pathologist. Some of the techniques a Speech Pathologist might use include:

Write a mealtime support plan

This is a way of educating carers so everyone knows how to support someone during mealtimes.

Advice around setting up the environment

This includes reducing distractions while eating and drinking and working with an Occupational Therapist to look at seating options to support posture.

Prescribing adaptive equipment

An individual may benefit from adapted cutlery, plates, cups and other equipment to increase independence and safety with eating and drinking.

Strategies to reduce challenging mealtime behaviours

Your Speech Pathologist may be able to help reduce challenging mealtime behaviours such as rapid eating, or they may work with a Behaviour Support Practitioner to address these.

Texture modified foods or fluids

Changing the texture of food can change the way food moves through our mouth and throat, reducing the risk of swallowing difficulties.

For more information call **1300 13 16 19**
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