

# Dysphagia



Some people have difficulties with eating, drinking or swallowing. This is called **dysphagia**.

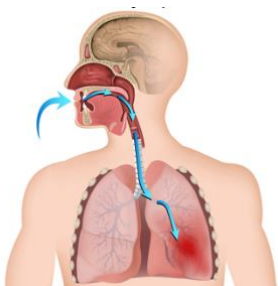


People with learning disabilities are more likely to have dysphagia.

Dysphagia can be dangerous. It can lead to problems like:



- Choking. This is when food might get stuck in your breathing pipe and you can't breathe.



- Aspiration. This is when food or drink goes down the wrong way, in your lungs. This can lead to a chest infection.



- Malnutrition. This is when you don't eat enough and your body does not get enough energy.



- Dehydration. This is when your body does not get enough water and this can make you unwell.

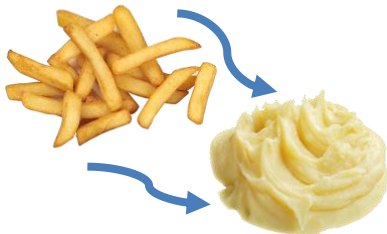
A speech and language therapist can help if you have dysphagia. They can:



- Come and look at your eating and drinking



- Work with you and your carers to help you eat and drink safely



- Make changes to your food and drink to make them easier or safer to have



- Try special equipment to make eating and drinking safer

## What does Dysphagia Look Like?



You should see a speech and language therapist if you have any of these **warning signs** when eating and drinking:



- Coughing or throat-clearing



- Choking



- Wet-sounding voice



- Difficulty breathing



- Change in colour



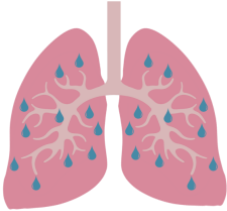
- Swallowing feels difficult



- Needing to take lots of swallows for one mouthful



- Other signs of difficulty, e.g. sweaty face, change in facial expression, tears in eyes



If you had dysphagia for a long time you might see:

- Lots of chest infections/aspiration pneumonia



- Losing weight from not eating enough - this is called malnutrition



- Urinary tract infections from not drinking enough, this is called dehydration



- Being sick, gagging or throwing up



- Heartburn – this is when food or drink comes back up from your tummy into your chest or throat and feels uncomfortable



- Feeling very upset or worried when eating or drinking



If you see any of these signs, ask to see a speech and language therapist.

What else can you do to help Dysphagia?



There are some things you can try to make eating and drinking easier and safer:

- Sit up straight during and for 30 minutes after eating and drinking



- Eat and drink slowly



- Drink a small bit a time



- Cut food into small pieces and take a small amount at a time



- Chew food carefully

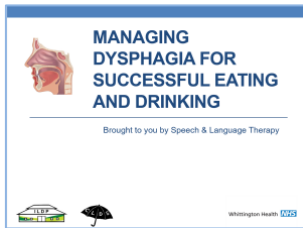


- Avoid difficult foods which are more dangerous like very chewy foods or hard sweets



- Keep your mouth and teeth clean –this can stop you getting chest infections

Carers who support people to eat and drink should:



- Go on Dysphagia training. SLTs run this training at CLDS



- Go on First Aid training so you know what to do if someone chokes



To refer to speech and language therapy you can

- Call CLDS on 020 79 74 37 37

or



- Email CLDS at [clds@camden.gov.uk](mailto:clds@camden.gov.uk)

and ask for a referral to speech and language therapy