

Multiple System Atrophy (MSA)

What is Multiple System Atrophy?

Multiple system atrophy (MSA) is a series of three related disorders which can affect movement, behaviour and cognition. **A combination of the symptoms caused by MSA can lead to difficulties in communication and swallowing.**

If you wish to know more information about your diagnosis and support available in your area, please visit the charity website on <http://www.msatrust.org.uk>

How can MSA affect communication?

The majority of people diagnosed with MSA will experience problems with their communication. This may include:

- Slurred speech (dysarthria)
- Strained/hoarse/croaky/tremulous vocal quality
- Speaking at a very fast rate
- Reduced facial expression/ability to maintain eye contact
- Small, spidery handwriting
- Reduced body language, including hand gestures

People with MSA can experience decreased cognitive functioning, which may also impact communication. People may experience:

- Slow thinking/slow learning/ reduced attention and inability to follow fast conversations.
- Losing one's train of thought while speaking
- Difficulties problem-solving and forward planning
- Problems storing and retrieving memories
- Difficulty making sense of perceptions/concepts
- Problems with language (e.g. word- finding difficulties)

- Difficulty sequencing actions, making it harder to carry-out everyday tasks

How can Speech and Language Therapy help?

Your Speech and Language Therapist can:

- Offer advice/strategies & provide specific exercises/programmes to help improve speech intelligibility
- Introduce alternative communication systems, which can help you to express yourself if speech becomes difficult.

How can MSA affect swallowing?

MSA may affect your ability to swallow. Symptoms may include:

- Coughing/choking when eating and drinking
- Drooling and poor saliva management
- Difficulty clearing and controlling food/drink in the mouth
- Delayed swallow reflex
- Food sticking in throat
- Problems swallowing medication
- Discomfort in chest or throat
- Recurrent chest infections
- Increased phlegm which is difficult to clear
- Fatigue when eating and drinking
- Reduced oral intake resulting in malnutrition, weight loss, reduced energy, dehydration and constipation

How can Speech and Language Therapy help?

It is important to identify symptoms of swallowing difficulties early. The Speech and Language Therapist can offer advice regarding swallowing techniques, food/drink texture modification (dependent on the stage of your condition) and saliva management.

They can provide compensatory strategies to help ensure food and drink is being swallowed safely. Alternative methods of eating and drinking (e.g. feeding tubes) may also need to be explored in the long-term.

How to contact us

Speech & Language Therapy Departments
Office Hours: Monday – Friday 9am – 4 pm
University Hospital of North Durham
Telephone: 0191 3332591

Darlington Memorial Hospital
Telephone: 01325 743152

Bishop Auckland General Hospital
Telephone: 01388 455714

Useful contacts

It is very important to talk to your GP if you have problems swallowing

Specialist Team at MSA Trust:
01434 381 932 (covers North of England, Scotland and Ireland)

Charity Website: www.msatrust.org.uk

Contact details



Central Appointments Bureau
Speech & Language Therapy
Bishop Auckland General Hospital
Cockton Hill Road
Bishop Auckland
County Durham
Tel: 01388 455200

Please help us:

We need your comments, concerns complaints and compliments to deliver the best service possible. Please let us know by speaking to a member of our staff. We learn from your feedback and use the information to improve and develop our services.

If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the **Patient Experience Team** on **0800 783 5774**, or email cdda-tr.PatientExperienceCDDFT@nhs.net.

We can make this information available in Braille, large print, audio or other languages on request.

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