

Following a speech and language therapy swallowing assessment in the community, a swallowing care plan has been put in place

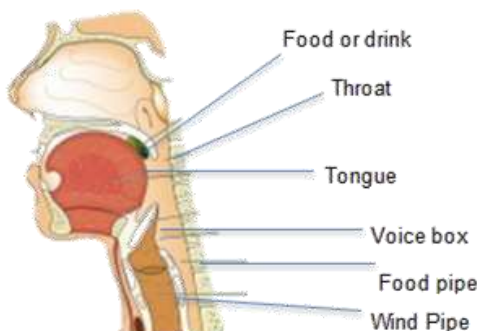
Swallowing involves nerves and the co-ordination of many muscles, some of which control the movement of the jaw, cheeks, lips, tongue, soft palate and the process of breathing

There are 3 stages of swallowing:-

Oral Stage: holding food and drink in your mouth, chewing food so it is ready to swallow and then moving the food to the back of your mouth and into your throat.

Pharyngeal Stage: when food is passed to the throat the swallow reflex automatically happens. The swallow reflex makes sure that your windpipe is closed off during the swallow, making sure that food does not go down the wrong way.

Oesophageal Stage: the food is then passed into your gullet or oesophagus and enters your stomach.



What can go wrong?

When a person experiences a swallowing problem (also known as dysphagia) there may be a risk of food or drink going down the *wrong way* and entering the windpipe; going down to the lungs instead of the stomach. This can cause chest infections, aspiration pneumonia and/or choking.

Swallowing problems can also contribute to risks of dehydration and malnutrition.

A swallowing problem is usually caused by conditions that damage the muscles and the nerves used in swallowing. This can happen due to conditions such as stroke, head injury, head and neck cancer, dementia and other progressive neurological conditions (e.g. Motor Neurone Disease, Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis and Huntingdon's Chorea).

Signs and symptoms of dysphagia include:-

- Drooling saliva or drinks
- Difficulty starting the swallow
- Coughing, choking or throat-clearing when eating and drinking
- Feeling food stuck in your throat

The Speech and Language Therapist assesses these problems and provides advice, helpful strategies and, if appropriate, therapy to make eating and drinking as SAFE as possible.

Sometimes it is necessary to change diet and fluid textures or place a person nil by mouth to prevent food and drink going down the wrong way onto the lungs.

Things that can help your swallow:-

- Avoid having meals when tired or anxious.
- Sit comfortably in an upright chair, never lie down when eating and drinking.

- If a carer is required to help with feeding, ensure they are at an equal height so that the food being given can be clearly seen.
- Allow time when eating and drinking.
- Avoid taking large mouthfuls of food or 'gulping down' drinks.
- Making sure each sip or mouthful is swallowed before taking the next one.
- Avoid mixing food and drink in the same mouthful.
- Avoid talking and eating at the same time.
- After eating, ensure there is no food left in the gums, teeth or cheeks.
- Try to remain upright for 20-30 minutes after eating.

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