

## Dysphagia

### What is Dysphagia?

Dysphagia covers a wide range of difficulties, all relating to a difficulty or pain to some degree when eating, drinking or swallowing. This can range from mild discomfort to an inability to eat, drink or swallow meaning there is no oral intake of food or drink.

The eating and drinking process is divided into five stages.

- Anticipatory Phase
- Oral Preparatory Phase
- Oral Phase
- Pharyngeal Phase
- Oesophageal Phase

Difficulties can occur at any one or more of these phases.

**What are the causes?** Dysphagia can result from a variety of medical conditions, including acute or progressive neurological conditions, trauma, disease, or as a result of surgery and/or medical treatments.



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### Recognising signs and symptoms

Possible signs and symptoms include::

- 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/difficult to get down.
- Repeated chest infections, chesty cough or high temperatures.
- Weight loss or dehydration
- Watery eyes when swallowing

### Modified diets

Recommendations may be made to avoid certain foods. These may include:

- Hard boiled sweets
- Stringy, fibrous texture e.g. pineapple, runner beans, celery and lettuce
- Hard and chewy foods
- Crunchy foods which splinter
- Mixed textures
- Very dry foods
- Seeded breads etc.

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### How do we support the students?

Our pupils are screened and assessed for Dysphagia. If it is felt that they present with difficulties, pupils have mealtime information sheets and risk assessments devised by Speech and Language Therapists with postgraduate training of Dysphagia. These are shared with staff to ensure that pupils are safe during all mealtimes. All identified pupils participate in weekly Social Eating Groups with Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapist's.

### How you can support at mealtimes?

- Cut up food into small bite size pieces
- Eat at an appropriate pace i.e. not too fast
- Chew food thoroughly
- Adopt good posture i.e. feet flat on ground, bottoms to the back of the chair, sitting straight up
- Drink regular sips of water with pauses to clear food
- Modify and adapt food textures e.g. add sauce
- Choose the most appropriate foods
- Do not eat/drink and walk at the same time.

