

# Information on Swallowing Problems in Adults

## What is a swallowing disorder?

Also called dysphagia, swallowing disorders can occur at various phases in the swallowing process:

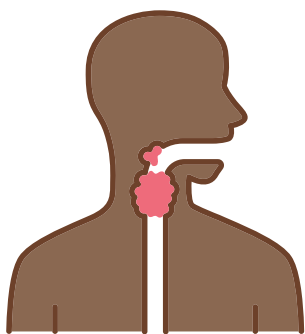
- Oral phase- Difficulty chewing and moving food and liquid around in the mouth and back to the throat
- Pharyngeal phase- Difficulty triggering the swallow, squeezing food or liquid down the throat, and closing the airway, so food and liquid don't go the wrong way.
- Esophageal phase- Difficulty relaxing and tightening the openings at the throat and stomach, and squeezing food through the esophagus

## What causes swallowing problems?

Damage to the nervous system such as stroke, brain injury, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's disease. Also, problems affecting the head and neck including cancer in the mouth, throat, or esophagus. As well as injury to the head or neck.

## How do swallowing problems affect people?

- Poor nutrition
- Risk of aspiration, which can lead to pneumonia



## What are signs and symptoms of dysphagia?

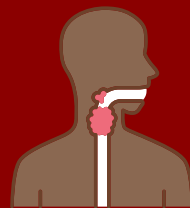
- Coughing during or right after eating or drinking
- Wet or gurgly sounding voice during or after eating or drinking
- Food or liquid leaking from the mouth
- Recurring pneumonia
- Weight loss or dehydration

## Where can I get help?

iSpeak Speech Therapy can perform swallowing evaluations and provide treatment when appropriate. Treatment varies greatly depending on the cause, symptoms, and type of problem. Treatment can include exercises, positioning strategies, and diet modification.

# A Guide to Speech Therapy

# Dysphagia Diet



## Dysphagia Diet Types-Foods

### Level 1- Pureed:

All food is blended into a pureed pudding-like consistency. The food is thick, moist, and cohesive (sticks together), with no chewing required. The diet is used when there is severe oral and/or pharyngeal impairment. Both meats and vegetables can be prepared to meet this diet criterion. Adding sauces and gravies can help blend and maintain a moist quality.

### Level 2- Mechanically Soft:

Some chewing ability is required for this diet. This diet is for mild to moderate swallowing difficulty. Food must be easy to chew, moist, cohesive, and easily formed into a bolus. Vegetables must be cooked and moist, not dry. Meat must be "finely diced" with sauce or gravy to obtain a moist, cohesive quality. Avoid dry, crumbled or coarse foods such as cornbread, grits, rice, crackers, etc.

### Level 3- Advanced:

This diet is for mild swallowing problems. This diet is similar to a regular diet with on minimal avoidances. Foods to avoid include very hard, tough, sticky, and crunchy foods such as peanut butter, crackers, etc. Meats should be in small bite-sized pieces.

### Level 4- Regular:

This is a regular diet with no limitations.

## Dysphagia Diet Types-Liquids

**Liquids:** When liquids are thickened the consistency becomes more cohesive, which can reduce/eliminate entry into the airway. Thickened liquids are inappropriate for some types of pharyngeal swallowing deficits and should not be considered a "fix all" approach.

### Thin liquids

No alteration

### Nectar-Thick Liquid

All liquids must have a thickening agent added to obtain a consistency of buttermilk or nectar. Stand a spoon in the center of the beverage and it should slowly fall to the side of the glass.

### Honey-Thick Liquid

All liquids must have a thickening agent added to obtain a consistency of honey. Stand a spoon in the center of the beverage and it should stand in the center of the glass.

### Pudding-Thick Liquid

All liquids should be thickened to the consistency of pudding or yogurt.

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**Dysphagia:** a medical term for a swallowing impairment  
**Aspiration:** occurs when food or liquid enters the airway and passes below the larynx (voice box) with eventual entry into the lungs