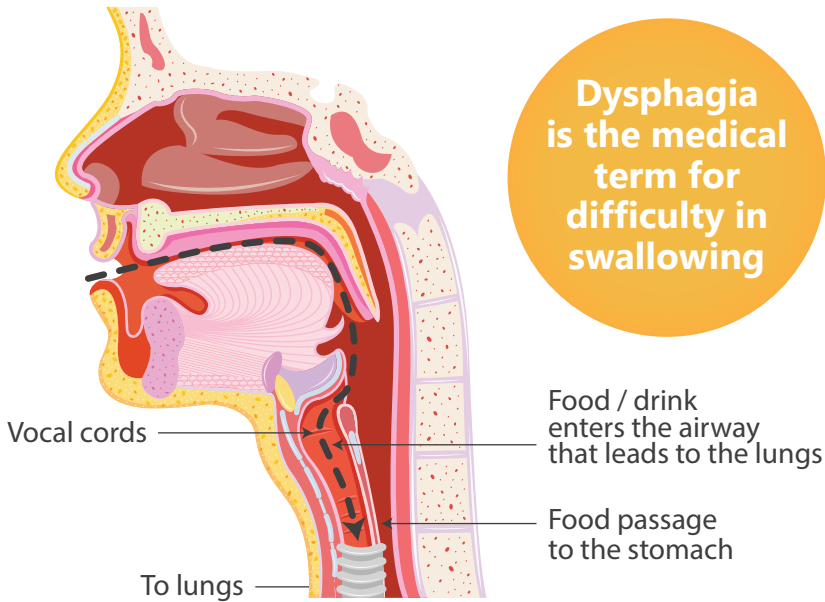


Dysphagia

Swallowing Difficulties



What is Dysphagia?



Dysphagia may occur during any part of the feeding process:

- Chewing
- Moving food or drink into the throat
- Swallowing food down the throat and into the stomach

This may result in the following problems:

- Food or drink going into the airway (aspiration)
- Lung infection
- Malnutrition and dehydration
- Impact on quality of life (e.g. avoiding meal gatherings)

Signs and symptoms of dysphagia:

- Food or drink leaking from the mouth/drooling
- Extra effort or time needed to chew or swallow
- Choking while eating
- Coughing during and right after eating or drinking
- Wet and gurgly sounding voice after eating
- Feeling food stuck in your throat or chest area
- Long mealtimes
- Unintentional weight loss

Causes of Dysphagia



Dysphagia can be caused by medical conditions that weaken or damage the muscles and nerves used for swallowing, such as:

- Neurological disorders (e.g. Parkinson's Disease, stroke, dementia)
- Respiratory conditions (e.g. obstructive lung disease)
- Head injury
- Head and neck cancers

Assessment of Dysphagia



Speech therapists assess patients' dysphagia to determine safe feeding options for them. A thorough swallowing assessment can take up to an hour. It includes:

- Taking the patient's medical history
- Assessing the structures and muscles used for swallowing
- Assessing the patient's ability to eat and drink safely

Further tests can include:

- A swallowing X-ray (Videofluoroscopy)
- Viewing the swallowing process using an endoscope (Fiberoptic Endoscopic Examination of Swallowing)

Treatment of Dysphagia



After the assessment, the speech therapist will diagnose the swallowing problem. If necessary, the speech therapist may recommend treatment by:

1. Recommending changes in diet texture and liquid consistency
2. Suggesting swallowing strategies to compensate for the swallowing problem
3. Introducing an exercise programme to strengthen the swallowing muscles

The goals of the swallowing treatment are to reduce the risk of aspiration/malnutrition and make eating/drinking as safe as possible, hence improving the patient's quality of life.

The frequency of therapy will depend on the patient's needs and preferences. It is recommended that family members join in the therapy sessions, as good family support is an important factor to the success of treatment.



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The information provided in this publication is meant purely for educational purposes and may not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. You should seek the advice of your doctor or a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical conditions.

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