



Your care team will recognise and act on signs of swallowing problems

Your care team will have a plan for any emergency responses. Staff will be trained to identify and respond to choking and detect infection.

Your care team will refer you to allied health professionals as needed, to assess your individual situation. This will involve reviewing the causes and risks relating to your swallowing difficulties and advise on ways to best support you, your nutrition, health, comfort and wishes.

With your agreement, your care team will begin by referring you to a speech pathologist who can assess and diagnose your swallowing difficulties.

They may also refer you to a dietitian to ensure your nutritional needs are still being met.

You may also see a dental expert to assess any oral health and hygiene needs, or an occupational therapist to advise on special utensils that may help you.

You may see your GP or a pharmacist if medications are making swallowing more difficult, or if medicines need to be changed so that you can swallow them more easily and safely.



Speech pathologists are qualified health professionals who assess and diagnose swallowing difficulties. They prescribe tailored management strategies that may include safe swallowing strategies and/or texture modified food/drinks.

Speech pathologists work with people with dysphagia to help them understand their situation and swallow food and drink more easily and safely, improving their mealtime experience. They can also provide specific mealtime support strategies and training to carers and staff.



Risks of swallowing difficulties include:

- aspiration pneumonia – food and/or drink ‘going down the wrong way’ and entering the airway or lungs instead of the stomach, causing irritation or chest infection, malnutrition and dehydration
- poor mealtime experience limiting opportunity for enjoyable social interactions
- reduced quality of life, including effects on mental health
- choking, in some cases causing death.



Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs)

are recognised professionals with the qualifications and skills to provide expert nutrition and dietary advice.

When an individual is identified with dysphagia (as assessed by a speech pathologist), a dietitian will work as part of the team to meet the dietary needs of the person.

An individual's agreement to texture modification of their food and drink should follow a discussion with the dietitian about their swallowing risks, health status, usual eating patterns, goals, food preferences and cultural choices. Dietitians can then help to ensure that individuals with swallowing difficulties have their nutrition requirements met in a safe and pleasurable manner to support a good quality of life.

Support strategies

Your care team, including your speech pathologist, dietitian and other health professionals, may recommend the following support strategies:

- ✓ individualised swallowing therapy exercises prescribed by the speech pathologist
- ✓ mealtime assistance strategies, for example a support person to ensure you take double swallows for each mouthful, are sitting upright and are given extra time to swallow and eat
- ✓ texture modification to food/drink to make it easier and safer to swallow, and reduce discomfort
- ✓ smaller more frequent meals
- ✓ nutritional strategies and support
- ✓ level of supervision and prompting required when eating or drinking
- ✓ support to have enjoyable mealtime social interactions.

If your family brings you food and drink,

you can ask the speech pathologist and dietitian to meet with your family so they know the best type of food and drink to bring you and understand what supports you need.



