

Early Identification of Swallowing Disorders

Eating and drinking is an enjoyable social activity. But swallowing problems can have a nutritional, emotional and social impact for the person and their family. If left untreated, swallowing problems can result in life threatening medical problems such as choking, poor nutrition, dehydration and pneumonia. Improvement of swallowing abilities leads to increased independence, participation in society and quality of life.

Healthcare professionals such as speech therapists can help to reduce or resolve these problems. But how do I know if I or my loved one has swallowing difficulties? Early identification is very important. If you notice any of the signs or symptoms below please see a speech therapist referred by your doctor.

- Coughing, choking or frequent throat clearing during or right after eating or drinking
- Persistent saliva production or inability to swallow saliva when eating
- Needing several attempts to swallow
- Retaining food in the mouth for a length of time
- Food residue remains in the mouth after swallowing
- Food falling out of mouth when eating or drinking
- Muscle weakness of lips so that food, liquid or saliva leaks out
- Feeling that food or drink gets stuck in the throat
- Suspecting that food or drink consumed is going down the wrong way
- A wet or gurgly voice during or after eating or drinking
- Shortness of breath when eating or drinking
- Extra time or effort needed to chew or swallow during meal times
- Avoiding certain foods or finding it hard to eat
- Increased amount of sputum after eating or drinking
- Frequent chest infections with no known cause
- Unexplained weight loss or dehydration