

## Speech and Language Therapy – What is Dysphagia?

This advice sheet gives you some general information on swallowing. If you need more detailed advice, please ask your speech and language therapist or registered dietitian, or ask your doctor to refer you to a speech and language therapist.

### **What is dysphagia?**

Dysphagia is defined as difficulty or discomfort in swallowing.

It can occur for a variety of reasons, and to people of different ages.

Dysphagia can occur in varying degrees, ranging from mild discomfort or difficulty, to complete inability to swallow.

### **Symptoms of dysphagia include:**

- Chest infections
- Coughing before, during and after swallowing
- Wet, gurgly voice after swallowing
- Throat clearing after swallowing
- Change in breathing after swallowing

### **Other signs of an unsafe swallow:**

- Choking
- Avoidance of food or drinks
- Loss of appetite and/or weight loss
- Poor saliva control
- Dribbling during eating and drinking



### **What can happen?**

Dysphagia can result in decreased food and fluid intake, longer time spent eating meals and less enjoyment of eating and drinking. Some people also avoid activities such as going to a restaurant.

Dysphagia can also result in food or drink going the wrong way into the airway, past the vocal cords, and going to the lungs.

For some people this can cause a chest infection called 'aspiration pneumonia'. Other possible problems are reduced oral intake, dehydration, weight loss and airway obstruction (choking).