

Patient information

Swallowing difficulties after a stroke

When we **swallow**, the **muscles** in our **throat** **close** off the **airway** and **open** up the **oesophagus** (food pipe).

Swallowing difficulties can occur **following** a **stroke**. The speed, strength and coordination of **muscles** in the **mouth** or **throat** can be **affected**. This is known as **dysphagia**.

Swallowing difficulties can lead to a **risk** of **food** or **drink** 'going down the wrong way' into the lungs. This is called **aspiration**.

Aspiration can lead to a risk of developing **chest infections** and **pneumonia**.

Signs of swallowing difficulties

- **Drooling** or **dribbling** of saliva or food and drink
- **Difficulty** **chewing** food
- Food **collecting** in the **mouth**
- **Not** being **able** to **swallow**
- Sounding **wet** and **gurgly** in the **throat**
- **Coughing** and **choking**
- Repeated **chest infections** or **pneumonia**

How can a Speech and Language Therapist help?

Speech and Language Therapists are **specialists** in **swallowing**. We can:

- **Assess** whether it is **safe** to **eat** and **drink**
- Provide **advice** or **strategies** to **help** safe swallowing

- Advise the **safest consistencies** of food and drink
- Provide **exercises** or **techniques** that help swallowing to **improve**

If it is not safe to swallow, you may be placed nil by mouth (NBM). The doctors may consider a **feeding tube** to allow **time** for your swallowing to **recover**.

How you can help?

- Give the **correct consistencies** of food and drink, as recommended by your Speech and Language Therapist
- **Sit** fully **upright** to eat and drink
- **Don't** try to eat and drink when **tired** or **drowsy**
- Take **time** between mouthfuls – go **slowly**
- Reduce **distractions**
- Try to remain **calm** and **relaxed**
- **Small mouthfuls** of food and sips of drink are usually **best**
- If possible, **help** the person to **feed themselves**
- If your friend or relative has **difficulty** with eating or drinking **whilst** you are **with them**, please **tell** a member of **staff** (e.g. difficulty chewing food, coughing after swallowing).

The future

Swallowing difficulties after a stroke often **improve** with **time**. **Recovery** can **vary** and some people may need **support** with swallowing after **discharge** from hospital. **Speak** to your **Speech and Language Therapist** for more information.



If **you** or **your relatives** want to talk to us, call: **01284 713303**, if you leave a message we will call back.



Our therapists work **Monday - Saturday 8.30am to 4.30pm**.

Please feel free to **ask questions** at any time, we are **on the ward every day except Sunday**.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>

