

## Patient information

# Swallowing difficulties and dementia

People with dementia can often experience difficulties eating and drinking. **These can include:**

- Difficulty with self-feeding
- Difficulty chewing
- Holding food in the mouth
- Issues with food going down the wrong way
- Refusing to eat/disinterest in food
- Spitting food out
- Forgetting to eat
- No longer recognising hunger signs
- No longer recognising food and drink
- Attempting to eat non-food items

## How can a speech and language therapist help with swallowing and dementia?

- Assess the type of swallowing difficulty and review how the person is progressing during their stay in hospital
- Assess whether it is safe for the patient to eat and drink
- Advise on the most suitable food and drink consistencies (e.g. some people may require their drinks to be thickened up with thickening powder to a syrup or yoghurt consistency so it goes down slower.)
- Advise on the best position for the person to sit in when eating and drinking

- Advise on supportive techniques such as cues and prompts when eating and drinking

## **How can you help your relative/friend with swallowing and dementia?**

- Ensure the individual is fully upright and alert
- Encourage self-feeding or seek advice about any appropriate equipment
- The patient may find finger foods easier to manage as they do not have to coordinate cutlery
- Ensure the patient can see and smell the food to maximize awareness
- Face patient and give eye contact
- Use a calm voice
- Ensure the environment is calm
- Reduce distractions
- Discourage talking with food in mouth
- Give small mouthfuls
- Pace oral intake
- Give stronger flavoured foods and drinks
- Be positive about eating and drinking and provide verbal prompts

*Seek advice from the Speech and Language Therapist about diet and fluid consistencies and swallowing advice. Ensure you follow these, as not following the recommendations could result in a chest infection and re-admission to hospital.*

*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>*



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