

## **Swallowing Disorders (Dysphagia) in Adults**

Swallowing disorders (dysphagia) is the impairment in swallowing function.

### **Different stages in the swallowing process:**

- Oral phase – the food or liquid is sucked, chewed and moved into the throat
- Pharyngeal phase – the swallowing reflex begins and the food is squeezed down the throat. The airway is closed off to prevent food or liquid from entering the airway (aspiration).
- Esophageal phase – food is squeezed through the esophagus into the stomach

### **Some causes of swallowing disorder**

- stroke
- brain injury
- spinal cord injury
- Parkinson's disease
- multiple sclerosis
- amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- Alzheimer's disease
- cancer in the mouth, throat, or esophagus
- decayed or missing teeth, or poorly fitting dentures

### **Signs or symptoms of swallowing disorders**

- coughing during or after eating or drinking
- wet or gurgly voice during or after eating or drinking
- extra effort or time needed to chew or swallow
- food or liquid leaking from the mouth or getting stuck in the mouth
- recurring chest infection after eating
- weight loss or dehydration

### **As a result, the patient may have:**

- poor nutrition or dehydration
- risk of food or liquid entering the airway (aspiration), which can lead to pneumonia and chronic lung disease
- less enjoyment of eating or drinking
- embarrassment or isolation in social situations involving eating

## Diagnosis

The speech therapist will evaluate the patient's swallowing problem by:

- Taking a detail medical history
- looking at the strength and movement of the muscles involved in swallowing
- observing feeding to see posture, behavior, and oral movements during eating and drinking
- special tests such as modified barium swallow (individual eats or drinks food or liquid with barium in it, and then the swallowing process is viewed on an X-ray) or endoscopic assessment (a lighted scope is inserted through the nose, and then the swallow can be viewed on a screen)



## Treatments

Depending on the cause and type of swallowing problem, the speech therapist may recommend:

- specific swallowing treatment (e.g., exercises to improve muscle movement, Deep Pharyngeal Neuromuscular Stimulation, VitalStim Therapy)
- positions or strategies to help the individual swallow more effectively
- specific food and liquid textures that are easier and safer to swallow

