

SWALLOWING AWARENESS DAY | 16 MARCH 2022

# DYSPHAGIA: A DIFFICULT DIAGNOSIS TO SWALLOW

Dysphagia is the medical term for swallowing difficulties. Some people with dysphagia have problems swallowing certain foods or liquids, while others can't swallow at all.

## Signs and symptoms of dysphagia

- Takes a long time to chew
- Food getting stuck in the throat
- Changes in voice, including nasal or 'wet' speech
- Difficulty chewing or controlling food in the mouth
- Coughing or choking when swallowing
- Changes in eating habits, such as eating slowly or avoiding meals altogether
- Significant unintended weight loss
- Recurrent chest infections or pneumonia
- Nasal regurgitation



FIND OUT MORE AT [RCSLT.ORG/DYSPHAGIA](https://www.rcslt.org/dysphagia)



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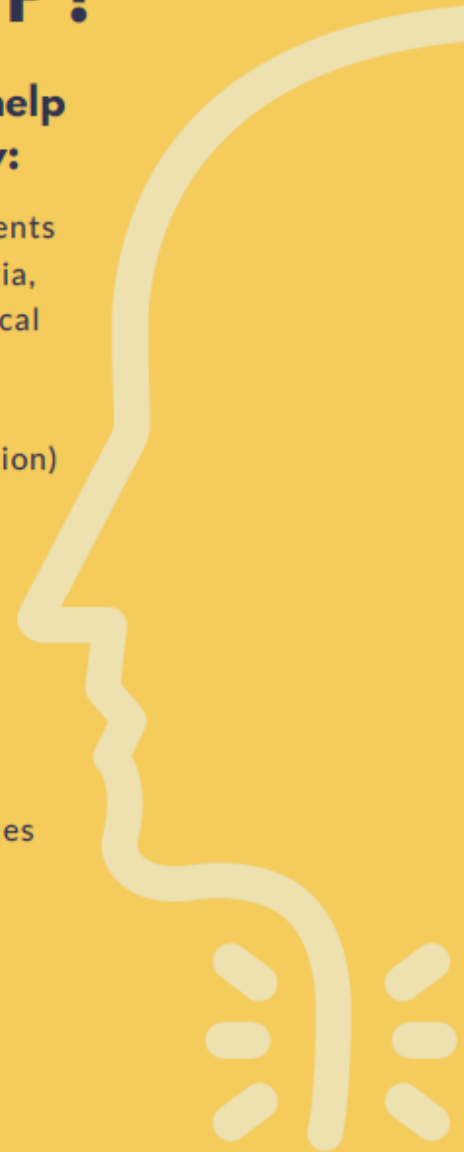
# DYSPHAGIA: HOW CAN SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS HELP?

**Speech and language therapists help to treat people with dysphagia by:**

- Completing detailed and accurate assessments
- Providing an accurate diagnosis of dysphagia, which may assist with the differential medical diagnosis
- Ensuring safety with regards to swallowing function (by reducing or preventing aspiration)
- Balancing risk factors with quality of life, taking into account the individual's preferences and beliefs
- Working with other health professionals, particularly dieticians, to optimise nutrition and hydration
- Stimulating improved swallowing with oral motor/sensory exercises, swallow techniques and positioning



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# DYSPHAGIA: HOW DOES IT AFFECT CHILDREN?

## Dysphagia affects:

Between **25 - 40 %** of a typically developing paediatric population

Between **31 - 99 %** of children with cerebral palsy

Between **26.8 - 40 %** of infants born prematurely

## What difficulties does dysphagia lead to in infants, children and young people?

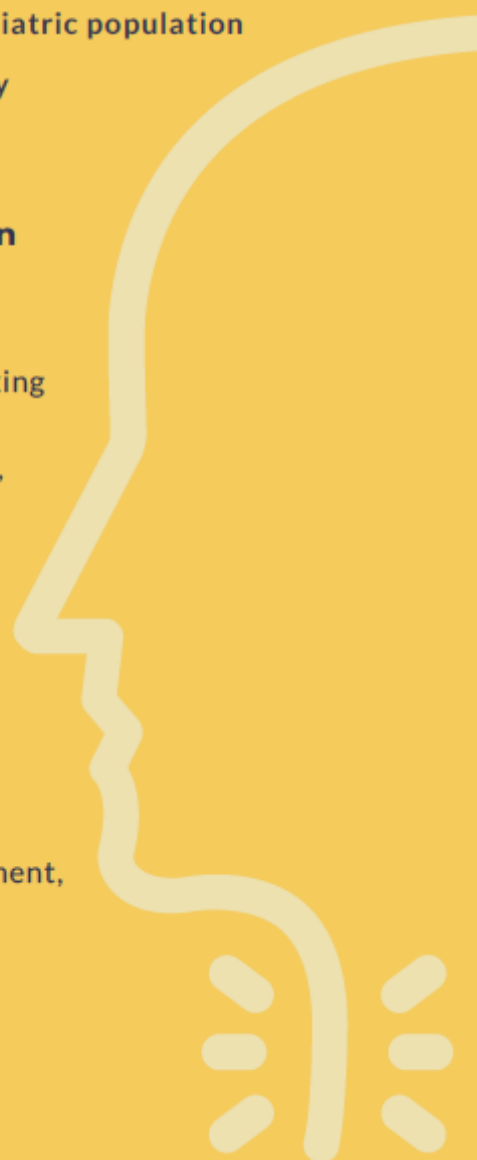
- Issues with the development of feeding skills
- Behavioural issues associated with eating, drinking and mealtimes
- Can cause chest infections, pneumonia, choking, dehydration, weight loss and malnutrition

## How can speech and language therapists help?

- They can assess and identify possible causes of eating and drinking difficulties
- They can provide mealtime assessments
- They can refer children for a videofluoroscopy
- They can recommend changes to feeding equipment, to the texture of food or drink, or to feeding positions



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# DYSPHAGIA: HOW IS IT ASSESSED?

## **Clinical examination:**

Looking, feeling and listening for signs of dysphagia, sometimes using a stethoscope.

## **Videofluoroscopy:**

An x-ray where food and drink is mixed with barium so we can see exactly what happens when a person swallows.

## **Fibreoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES):**

A small endoscope is passed through the nose to visualise the larynx (voice box) and airway during the swallow.



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# DYSPHAGIA: WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

- Exercises can sometimes help to improve the muscles we use to swallow.
- Strategies/postures can sometimes be used to improve the safety of the swallow.
- Modifying the texture of food or drinks can sometimes make eating and drinking safer (be sure to seek advice from your speech and language therapist).

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## DYSPHAGIA: WHO DOES IT AFFECT?



**95%**

of people with motor  
neurone disease



**68%**

of people with  
dementia in care homes



**65%**

of people who have  
had a stroke



**50%**

of people with  
Parkinson's disease



**33%**

of people with  
multiple sclerosis



**15%**

of people with a  
learning disability



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