

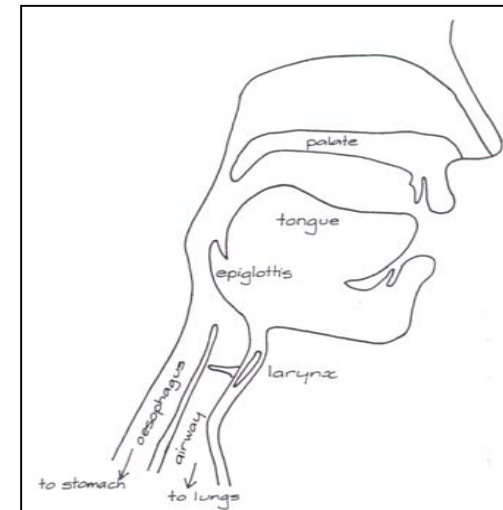
**Safe swallowing strategies:**

- Eat and drink when awake and alert.
- Avoid distractions.
- Sit upright (in a chair if possible).
- Keep chin down.
- Take small mouthfuls or sips.
- Swallow each mouthful before having the next.
- Do not rush meals.
- Check for any food remaining in the mouth.
- If voice sounds wet, clear throat and swallow again.
- Stop eating or drinking if short of breath or coughing.

**NB:** Please notify Nursing Staff or the Speech Pathologist before trying foods brought from home.



# Swallowing Problems



**Contact details:**

Speech Pathology Department, \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

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### ***What causes swallowing problems?***

If someone has a stroke, head injury, respiratory problem, dementia, degenerative disease or is unwell following an illness or operation, they may have a swallowing problem.

Sometimes muscles used for swallowing can be weak, may work too slowly or are not well coordinated. A person with swallowing difficulties may demonstrate one or more of the following features:

- Coughing, choking or throat clearing when swallowing.
- Food or drink spilling from the mouth.
- Food left in the mouth after swallowing.
- Difficulty chewing.
- Shortness of breath while eating or drinking.
- Food getting caught in the throat.
- Difficulty swallowing tablets.
- Weight loss.
- Raised temperature.
- Recurrent chest infections or pneumonia.

If you notice any of these warning signs, speak to the Nurse or Doctor and ask them to contact the Speech Pathologist.

Some of these warning signs may indicate that a person is at risk of aspiration. Aspiration is when food, drink or saliva goes into the lungs instead of the stomach. This can lead to pneumonia or even death.

### ***How do Speech Pathologists help?***

Speech Pathologists are responsible for managing swallowing problems and will assess if a patient is safe to eat or drink. They will recommend food and fluid consistencies; eating postures and strategies to improve safety of swallowing.

#### ***Food and fluid consistencies:***

People who have swallowing problems often find it hard to manage thin fluids such as water, juice, coffee, tea and beer. These drinks require fast and precise muscle control as they move down the throat quickly.

Thickened fluids hold together better when in the mouth and move more slowly down into the throat. This gives the muscles time to work together. It allows more control of the fluid and can help to prevent drinks from going down into the lungs.



Patients may also have their diets changed to a softer consistency (eg. puree, minced or soft) as this allows them to chew and swallow more safely.