



# Swallowing

Information for people living in or visiting the residential aged care facility

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Sometimes older people have trouble swallowing, (also called dysphagia).

This can be because of changes to the muscles you use to swallow. It can also be because you lose your sense of taste or smell, or you have missing teeth.

People with medical conditions including stroke, Parkinson's disease and dementia often have trouble swallowing.

When you have trouble swallowing, food and drink can get into your lungs. This can cause coughing, choking, chest infections and pneumonia.

Swallowing problems can lead to weight loss and dehydration.

Eating and drinking is an important part of life, trouble swallowing can be frustrating.

Swallowing problems can be treated.

## Signs you may have a swallowing problem

- You have trouble chewing or swallowing food.
- You take longer to eat or drink.
- You can't keep food or liquid in your mouth.
- You cough or choke during or after eating.
- Food or tablets get stuck in your throat.
- You have pain or discomfort when swallowing.
- You become short of breath or your breathing changes when eating and drinking.
- Your voice sounds wet or gurgles after eating or drinking.
- You lose weight because it is hard to eat.
- You avoid certain foods or drinks because they are difficult to swallow.
- You have chest infections.

## Ways to manage swallowing problems

- Sit up as straight as you can whenever you eat or drink.
- Sit upright for at least 20 minutes after you have finished a meal.



- Take your time when you eat, do not hurry, take small mouthfuls and chew carefully.
- Talk to your doctor if you have trouble swallowing.
- You may need to see a speech pathologist, who can teach you to eat and drink more easily.
- The texture of your food and drinks may need to be changed. A speech pathologist can tell you about this.
- If your friends and family bring you food, make sure it is safe to eat. Check with staff.
- Have your medications checked, they may be making your mouth dry or making you drowsy.
- Keep your mouth and teeth healthy.

## Working together

You, your family and friends are important members of the care team. You know what is normal for you.

Let staff know straight away if you notice any changes to your swallowing or you have trouble eating or drinking. Don't wait to see if you get better – it's always better to get help early.

Working together with staff will help keep you healthy. Talk to staff and ask questions. They need your help to give you the best care.

## Questions to ask staff

- Do I need to see a speech pathologist?
- Do I need to see a dentist?
- Does my diet need to be changed?
- Do my drinks need to be thickened?
- What can I do to improve my swallowing?



## Want to know more?

Read about difficulty swallowing (dysphagia) on the [Health Direct website](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/dysphagia) <<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/dysphagia>>.

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Available from the [Department of Health residential aged care information web page](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/residential-aged-care/participating-with-consumers)

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