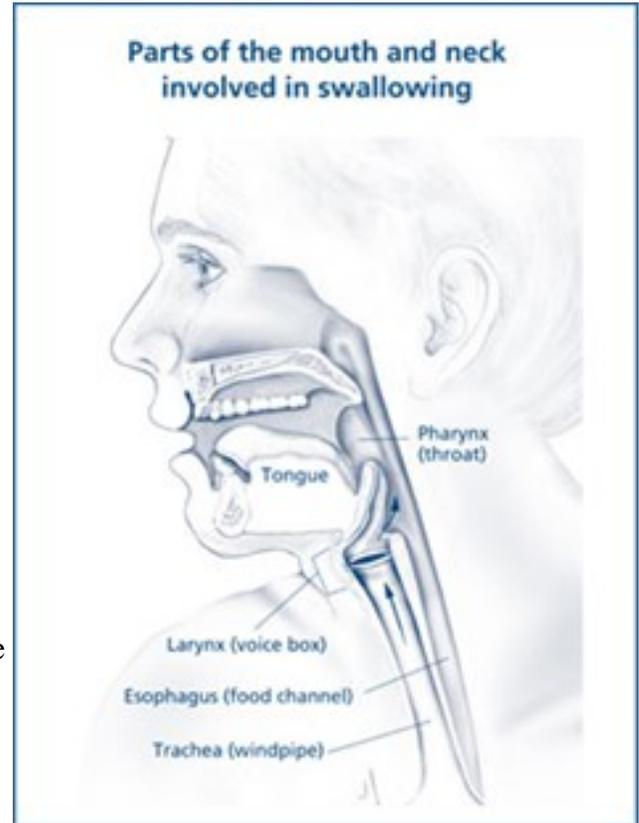


### **What is dysphagia?**

People with dysphagia have difficulty swallowing and may even experience pain while swallowing. Some people may be completely unable to swallow or may have trouble safely swallowing liquids, foods, or saliva. When that happens, eating becomes a challenge. Often, dysphagia makes it difficult to take in enough calories and fluids to nourish the body and can lead to additional serious medical problems and malnutrition.

### **How does dysphagia occur?**

Dysphagia occurs when there is a problem with the nerve control or the structures involved in any part of the swallowing process. Weak tongue or cheek muscles can make it hard to move food around in the mouth for chewing. A stroke can make it difficult to start the swallowing response that allows food and liquids to move safely through the throat. Another difficulty can occur when weak throat muscles, such as after cancer surgery, cannot move all of the food toward the stomach.



### **What are possible signs that a person may have dysphagia?**

- coughing while eating or drinking;
- choking on food, fluid, or medication;
- a gurgly sounding voice, especially after eating or drinking;
- difficulty swallowing food or fluid; and
- the pocketing of food on one side of the mouth.

### **Questions a physician may ask to check if someone may have dysphagia:**

- Do you often cough or choke after eating or drinking?
- Does it sometimes feel as though food is going down the “wrong way”?
- Do you often feel that food is stuck in your throat?
- How long does it take you to eat a meal?
- Is eating sometimes less enjoyable than it used to be?
- Have you recently lost weight without trying?

## So what are some problems caused by dysphagia?

- You may not be able to eat enough of the right foods to stay healthy or maintain an ideal weight, and become malnourished.
- Food pieces that are too large for swallowing may enter the throat and block the passage of air.
- When foods or liquids enter the airway of someone who has dysphagia, coughing or throat clearing may not be able to remove it. Food or liquid that stays in the airway can enter the lungs and allow harmful bacteria to grow, resulting in a lung infection called aspiration pneumonia. Aspiration pneumonia is the leading cause of hospitalization and death in nursing home residents.



## How is dysphagia treated?

Medical doctors and speech-language pathologists evaluate and treat swallowing disorders using a variety of tests. One is to actually look into the mouth and throat with a special scope and see how the swallowing mechanism responds to a puff of air, food, or liquids.

Another test takes a video x-ray, filming a special liquid during the swallowing process to see where it goes. Such images help identify where in the swallowing process someone is experiencing

problems. **Speech-language pathologists** use this method to see what changes need to be made to make swallowing safer. The changes may be in the texture of the food, the size of the food pieces, the position of the head and neck, and/or chin so that food substances do not enter the trachea when swallowing.

For some people, treatment may involve muscle exercises to strengthen weak facial muscles or to improve coordination. For others, treatment may involve learning to eat in a special way such as eating with their head turned to one side or looking straight ahead. Some people who cannot swallow thin liquids may need to add special thickeners to their drinks. Other people may have to avoid hot or cold foods or drinks. However, for some, consuming enough foods and liquids by mouth may no longer be possible, and these people may need a feeding tube, that bypasses or supplements the part of the swallowing mechanism that is not working normally.



Many individuals report difficulty in following a diet of thickened liquids due to its cost, accessibility, and taste. There is also a reported decreased quality of life in individuals with dysphagia. Psychosocial effects such as depression, isolation, and anxiety can lead to poor compliance. Not following the diet may result in the person not getting enough of the nutrients and fluids needed and this can lead to malnutrition, dehydration, weight loss, weakness, respiratory illness, and increased risk of falls. In fact, evidence has shown that people not following the prescribed thickened liquid diets had a higher death rate compared with those who followed the diet.

### Where can I get help?

Contact your doctor, who may refer you to an **otolaryngologist** (a doctor who specializes in diseases of the ear, nose, throat, head, and neck) and a speech-language pathologist. You may be referred to a neurologist if a stroke or other neurologic disorder is the cause of the swallowing problem.

There are websites such as [www.dysphagia-diet.com](http://www.dysphagia-diet.com) for products, recipes, and other resources. There are recipe books such as *Living With Dysphagia: A Food and Beverage Guide for Individuals With Chewing and Swallowing Difficulties*. If someone is not sure about a product in the grocery store it is always good to ask their speech-pathologist or dietitian familiar with the diet and food modifications required.

M W Y O J M C H F A N P C D R  
 B A B F F C C E S X E A I B T  
 D V L O Z E T P C Q K T W Q F  
 D Z O N E S I T M J C H L C K  
 G D Z P U R Z Q A C I O R O I  
 S U S L A T Y C V O H L H U G  
 A G O T T H R O A T T O O G D  
 S D I U Q I L I C R N G K H S  
 H O P W N Q Y O T F A I P E L  
 N E F Z O Q U E C I T S I Z J  
 A N U G R L X U Y R O T Z Q L  
 P H V T Y Q L W M M A N A O B  
 G U F W E H C A L F N H R I D  
 V H B G Q I W Q W N Y I M L X

### Dysphagia Word Search Puzzle

- ASPIRATION
- CHEW
- CHOKER
- COUGH
- FOODS
- LIQUIDS
- MALNUTRITION
- PATHOLOGIST
- SPEECH
- SWALLOW
- THICKEN
- THROAT

## Got Milk? What to make of it?

If you are receiving more milk from Meals on Wheels than you care to drink, or you have milk that is about to go beyond the sell by date, think about using it to make tasty beverages, desserts, and breakfast cereals. This will help you get your daily quota of calcium (1200 mg).



Use it to make instant pudding or regular cooked pudding.



Use it to make instant cocoa or regular cooked cocoa.



Use it to make a smoothie with fresh or frozen fruit. One cup milk to one cup of fruit. Or make a milkshake with some ice cream and syrup.

## Puzzle Solution

(Over,Down,Direction)  
ASPIRATION(10,1,SW)  
CHEW(7,13,W)  
CHOKER(10,5,SE)  
COUGH(14,4,S)  
FOODS(5,2,SW)  
LIQUIDS(7,8,W)  
MALNUTRITION(1,1,SE)  
PATHOLOGIST(12,1,S)  
SPEECH(3,6,NE)  
SWALLOW(10,15,NW)  
THICKEN(11,7,N)  
THROAT(5,7,E)



Use it to make oatmeal, instead of water, and add milk once it is cooked. Add fruit and nuts too.

**Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments.**

**For information, call 518-382-8481, #9, ext.304**



### **Do you have a questions or concerns about what to eat?**

If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County's Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269.

Leave a message, if necessary, for dietitian to call you back.

**Check out our website for nutrition resources:  
<http://ccschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors>**

Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services denies no person services or access to service based upon race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status and/or handicapping conditions. Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services is primarily funded with County tax dollars. Supplemental funding is through the New York State Office for the Aging under Title III-B/D, III-C-1, III-C-2, III-F of the Federal Older Americans Act, and New York State Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), Community Services for the Elderly Act (CSE), Congregate Services Initiative (CSI), and the Wellness In Nutrition (WIN).

OFA– April Dysphagia 2018