

Practical Tips for Managing Dysphagia

At SwalTech we believe in rehabilitation of swallowing impairment. With rehabilitation, many patients with acute conditions can recover functional, if not optimal, swallowing. Those with chronic conditions may be able to stay eating safely and longer with rehabilitation. We strongly suggest that you seek out a clinician, typically a speech and language therapist/pathologist, who is a strong advocate for active, intensive rehabilitation and follow their advice.

Rehabilitation takes time, so there may be a period when you are not able to eat, or you can only safely eat with some modifications. Your clinician may prescribe some techniques for you to follow; their advice will be best since they will know you and your swallowing problem.

Here are some practical tips for managing dysphagia (difficulty swallowing) while you work on your rehabilitation:

1. Perform swallowing exercises:

- Follow exercises recommended by your speech therapist.

2. Maintain good oral hygiene:

- Brush teeth and rinse mouth regularly to prevent infections.

3. Staying active is good for healthy lungs:

- if you are able get up and move about or do some exercises after every meal.

4. If you can drink fluid, stay hydrated:

- Sip water throughout the day.

5. Practice proper posture:

- Sit upright at a 90-degree angle when eating or drinking.
- Remain upright for 30-60 minutes after meals.

6. If you can eat and drink, avoid distractions:

- Focus on eating and swallowing.
- Minimize talking while eating.
- Although you may need to avoid unfocused distractions, sometimes eating and drinking at the table with another person is helpful for keeping the focus on swallowing. Use them as a model.

7. Ask your clinician if you should take smaller bites and sips:

- Use a teaspoon instead of a tablespoon.
- Take your time while eating and drinking.
- Sometimes bigger bits and sips are needed for sensation, so be sure to ask.

8. Consider adaptive utensils:

- Specially designed cups, straws, or spoons may facilitate easier swallowing.
- Ask your clinician if these will help you.

9. Be aware of medication side effects:

- Some medications can affect swallowing; discuss with your doctor.

10. If necessary, you may need to modify food textures:

- Avoid dry, crumbly, or sticky foods.
- Choose softer, smoother foods.
- Puree or blend foods when necessary.

11. If necessary and prescribed by your clinician, you may need to thicken liquids:

- Aim for the consistency recommended by your healthcare provider. Your clinician will help you do this.
- Some liquids may thicken using other food or drink – adding yoghurt to milk, or fruit puree to fruit juice
- Use commercial thickeners or natural thickeners like cornstarch.

12. Learn the Heimlich manoeuvre:

- Teach family members or caregivers this life-saving technique if someone is choking.