

Swallowing Problems

Having a hard time swallowing is called dysphagia. It can affect eating, drinking, and taking medicine. Swallowing problems may lead to poor nutrition.

Signs of Swallowing Problems

- Coughing, choking or a wet, gurgling voice while eating and drinking
- Feeling food stuck in your throat or mouth
- Drooling
- Having a weak cough or weak voice
- Having trouble or pain with swallowing
- Avoiding some or all food or liquids

Swallowing problems can be caused by:

- A stroke
- Head and neck cancer
- Injuries to the throat
- A head injury
- Brain disorders
- Radiation
- Some medicines
- A tracheostomy

Your care

If your doctor suspects a swallowing problem, a Speech Language Pathologist, called a SLP, may need to check your swallowing. The SLP is trained to help patients with swallowing problems. Swallowing problems are checked two ways:

- **Swallowing check (evaluation):** The SLP watches you eat food and drink liquids that are thick and thin. If swallowing problems are seen, more testing may be needed.
- **Modified barium swallow:** This test is done to check how you swallow. X-ray pictures are taken as foods and liquids move from your mouth through your throat as you swallow different foods and liquids.

Based on the results of the tests, your care may include:

- Having certain types of food or liquid thickness
- Holding your head in a certain way while you eat and drink
- Doing exercises to make your swallowing easier and safer

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.