

Oesophageal Difficulties

Speech and Language Therapists are specialists in the assessment and management of **oropharyngeal dysphagia** and are **not** trained to assess or manage difficulties occurring at the **oesophageal stage** of swallowing.

Symptoms of oesophageal dysphagia include:

- A sensation of food sticking in the chest or throat after swallowing
- Difficulty swallowing food or fluids
- Regurgitation of food or fluids
- Chest discomfort or pain when eating
- Heartburn or reflux symptoms
- A chronic cough or frequent throat clearing, particularly after eating
- Unintentional weight loss
- Bad breath or an unpleasant taste in the mouth

We would recommend **referral to an alternative service**, such as Gastroenterology, which specialises in the assessment and management of disorders of the oesophagus and stomach.

In the meantime, we have included some general advice below that may help to manage symptoms.

Diet and Fluid Modifications

- Choose naturally soft, moist foods. Add sauces such as gravy, tomato ketchup, mayonnaise, white sauce, cream, or custard to increase moisture.
- Mash, mince, or liquidise foods where appropriate.
- Take care with bread and tough meats. Choose soft sandwich fillings and remove crusts where possible. Be aware that bread can become sticky and difficult to clear. Bread dipped in soup may be easier to manage.
- Consider reducing foods and drinks that can exacerbate symptoms, including:
 - Acidic foods, such as citrus fruits and tomatoes
 - Acidic drinks, such as fruit juice
 - Alcohol and caffeinated drinks
 - Smoking cigarettes

Eating and Drinking Strategies

- Take an additional swallow of saliva between mouthfuls.
- Take small sips of drink between mouthfuls of food.
- Some people find that sipping sparkling water or other carbonated drinks during meals is helpful.
- Avoid drinking through straws or spouted cups where possible. Use an open cup.
- Eat and drink slowly, take small mouthfuls, and chew food thoroughly.

- Eat smaller meals more frequently throughout the day.
- Sit upright when eating and remain upright for approximately 30 minutes after meals.
- Avoid eating late in the evening. Aim to finish eating at least two hours before going to bed.
- Avoid eating immediately before exercise.
- Maintain good oral hygiene by brushing your teeth and mouth regularly and cleaning any dentures thoroughly.

Maximising Your Nutrition

If you are experiencing unintentional weight loss, consider speaking with your GP about a referral to a dietitian for nutritional assessment and support.