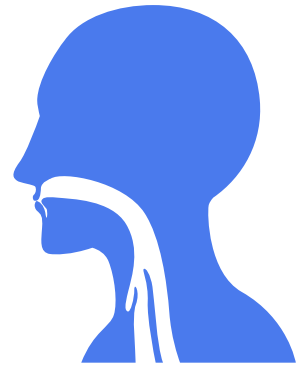




# Dysphagia

A swallowing disorder, known as dysphagia, may occur as a result of various medical conditions. Dysphagia is defined as problems involving the oral cavity, pharynx, esophagus, or gastroesophageal junction. Those with dysphagia may be completely unable to swallow or may have trouble safely swallowing liquids, foods, or saliva. Malnutrition and dehydration, aspiration pneumonia, compromised general health, chronic lung disease, choking and even death may be a consequence of dysphagia.



## Etiology

- Neurologic Injury (e.g., cerebrovascular accident, transient ischemic attack, brain injuries, spinal cord injuries)
- Dementia (e.g., Parkinson's, Alzheimer's)
- Developmental disabilities (e.g. cerebral palsy)
- Neurodegenerative Conditions (e.g., multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis)
- Infectious diseases (e.g. sepsis)
- Pulmonary diseases (e.g. chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease
- Cardiothoracic surgery
- Oral/throat/esophageal cancers
- Trauma or surgery involving the head/neck
- Critical care that may have included oral intubation/tracheostomy
- Decayed or missing teeth

## Signs and Symptoms

- Coughing during or right after eating or drinking
- Throat clearing during meals
- Wet or "gurgly" sounding voice
- Extra effort or time needed to chew or swallow
- Food or liquid leaking from mouth
- Food getting stuck in mouth or pocketing inside the cheek

**Impaired senses can also lead to "silent aspiration". This occurs when difficulty swallowing leads to aspiration without any overt signs or symptoms. More subtle symptoms of dysphagia may include:**

- Watery eyes, runny nose during meals
- Refusal to eat/drink, dehydration or poor nutrition
- Difficulty breathing following meals
- Recurrent pneumonia, allergies, colds, or chest congestion
- Unexplained weight loss

## Interventions

- Notify physician
- Referral to speech-language pathologist
- Instrumental and/or non-instrumental swallowing assessments
- Postural modifications
- Diet texture modifications
- Liquid consistency modifications
- Oral motor exercises
- Pharyngeal strengthening exercises
- Laryngeal elevation exercises
- Safe swallow strategy training
- Adaptation of mealtime environments
- Adaptive utensils
- Caregiver training and education

Contact [clinicalteam@reliant-rehab.com](mailto:clinicalteam@reliant-rehab.com) for more information.