

Tips to Help Manage Your Dysphagia



Dysphagia refers to difficulty swallowing. It is a medical and feeding issue which is more common in older adults. Without treatment, it can lead to malnutrition, weight loss, aspiration pneumonia, dehydration and decreased quality of life. There is also the risk of choking if food blocks the airway.

What causes Dysphagia?

There are many causes of Dysphagia, here are a few:

- Stroke
- Head or neck injury
- Cerebral palsy
- Some forms of dementia
- Cancer

Dysphagia should be treated by a healthcare team. This team may consist of a:

- Doctor
- Registered Dietitian
- Nurse
- Speech Language Pathologist
- Occupational Therapist

Are there different levels of Dysphagia?

Yes. Depending on the severity of dysphagia diets can differ. Diets can include regular textures, mechanically soft (or minced and moist) and pureed foods.

Modifying food textures and the thickness of fluids helps one chew and swallow food safely. The severity of dysphagia may change over time so follow the plan provided to you by your healthcare team.

Mechanically soft or moist and minced foods. These foods are best for people who have trouble chewing.

- Cooked fruits and vegetables
- Graham crackers
- Moist ground meat
- Soft bread
- Creamy cereal products

Pureed foods. These foods are smooth with a pudding-like consistency and are easy to swallow without chewing. Mom's Meals provides a Pureed Menu that has a variety of meals full of flavor that meet these guidelines.

■ What are the different fluid consistencies?

Some people with dysphagia may have difficulties swallowing liquids. They may need liquids to be thickened. Below are terms and definitions that describe the consistency of liquids.

- **Nectar-like or mildly thick fluids.** These run fast through the prongs of a fork and flow slowly off a spoon. You may be able to drink these from a cup.
- **Honey-like or moderately thick.** These fluids slowly drip through the prongs of a fork. You may be able to drink these from a cup, but they may not go through a straw.
- **Pudding-like or extremely thick fluids.** These do not pour or go through the prongs of a fork. They are too thick to drink from a cup. It is best to spoon them into your mouth.

Pre-thickened liquids and commercial thickeners are available in all consistencies. Make sure to follow the instructions to get the thickness you need.

Helpful tips for eating with Dysphagia:

- ✓ **Chew slowly and completely** to reduce the risk of choking
- ✓ **Use assistive devices** to make self-feeding easier
- ✓ **Cut food into small pieces** to help with chewing and swallowing
- ✓ **Have someone around to assist during mealtime**
- ✓ **Stay hydrated and well nourished**, a supplement or multi-vitamin may help
- ✓ **Try oral motor exercises**, they may help by improving your swallowing
- ✓ **Maintain good oral hygiene** and make sure you have a clean mouth

For more information about nutrition visit:

www.eatright.org

momsmeals.com

