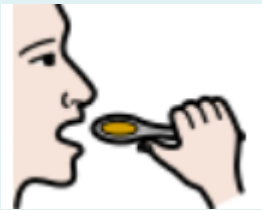


Eating and drinking difficulties

Information for parents and carers



Key points



Dysphagia means difficulty with eating and swallowing.



There are lots of reasons why children have dysphagia.



There are lots of signs of dysphagia to look out for.

What is paediatric dysphagia?

Eating and/or drinking difficulties in children is also known as paediatric dysphagia. This may involve problems with chewing, coordinating lip and tongue movements, or swallowing.

There are 3 stages to a swallow and difficulties can occur at any of these.


- **Oral phase** – sucking, chewing and moving food or liquid into the throat.
- **Pharyngeal phase** – starting the swallow, squeezing food down the throat, and closing off the airway to prevent food or liquid from entering the airway (aspiration) or to prevent choking.
- **Oesophageal phase** – relaxing and tightening the openings at the top and bottom of the feeding tube in the throat and squeezing food through the oesophagus into the stomach.

Who has dysphagia?

Children may have eating and drinking difficulties if they:

- were born prematurely
- have specific conditions such as cerebral palsy or downs syndrome
- were born with cleft palate
- have difficulties with gastro-oesophageal reflux
- related to sensory difficulties eg children with autism
- had a difficult feeding history when younger.

Children with feeding and swallowing problems have a variety of symptoms. Not all signs and symptoms are present in every child.

 If you have any questions you can contact us on:

0300 300 2019

A child who has dysphagia may have difficulty with the following:

- aspiration – this is when food or drink goes down the wrong way into the lungs which can cause recurring pneumonia or chest infections
 - choking episodes
 - coughing or gagging during meals
 - poor nutrition and weight loss
 - poor general health
 - food refusal. This means they refuse food or drink, they won't accept different textures of food (eg only pureed foods or crunchy cereals)
 - they are distressed at mealtimes (arching or stiffening of the body during feeding, irritability, or lack of alertness during feeding)
 - difficulty moving onto new food textures
- long feeding times (e.g. more than 30 minutes)
 - difficulty chewing.
 - difficulty breastfeeding
 - excessive drooling or food/liquid coming out of the mouth or nose
 - difficulty coordinating breathing with eating and drinking
 - increased stuffiness during meals
 - gurgly, hoarse or breathy voice quality
 - frequent spitting up or vomiting (caused by reflux).

If you think your child may have paediatric dysphagia, please ask your health visitor or GP to refer you to the Children's Therapy Service or contact us on **0300 300 2019**

A child who can't completely close their lips to keep food from falling out of their mouth or a child who sucks at food because they cannot chew it may have a feeding disorder which is different to dysphagia.

Please ask your Health Visitor for advice around this and any problems with 'fussy eating'.


Please tell us how you feel about the services we provide.

If you have a compliment, concern or complaint please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) and Complaints Services on **0800 013 2319** or **Snhs.solentfeedback@nhs.net**
Alternatively, visit: **www.solent.nhs.uk/contact-us**

www.solent.nhs.uk

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