

### Tablets:

- ✓ Some people can experience difficulty swallowing tablets. Your Speech & Language Therapist / GP / Pharmacist can help.



- ✓ It may **help** to try swallowing them **one at a time** with a teaspoon of **yoghurt or jam** instead of water.

### Mouth Care:

- ✓ Dry mouth caused by smoking / medications / use of oxygen masks can impact on swallowing. Speak to your doctor about **saliva replacement products**.



- ✓ Make sure **to regularly brush** your teeth and maintain good oral hygiene. This reduces the risk of infection.

### Reflux:

- ✓ **Reflux** is a condition that features a burning pain (i.e., heartburn), that occurs when stomach acid flows back up into the food pipe. Refluxed material in the throat can slip into the chest and cause an infection.
- ✓ Food/ drinks which can potentially cause reflux include coffee, alcohol, fizzy drinks, citrus fruits and spicy food. It can help to limit these foods / drinks.
- ✓ Please **attend your G.P.** who can help **manage your reflux**.

### Food & Nutrition:

- ✓ **Avoid chewy / dry crumbly foods.** These foods require more time and energy. Chew foods that are soft and easy to chew. Add sauce or gravy to **moisten food**.
- ✓ Keep cupboards stocked with a supply of foods which require little preparation.



- ✓ If you have concerns in relation to your nutrition, contact your doctor or dietitian for advice.

### How can a Speech & Language Therapist help with swallowing difficulties?

A Speech & Language Therapist can:

- Assess current swallowing function and help detect the cause of the swallowing difficulty
- Recommend appropriate food and fluids
- Recommend strategies to improve swallowing safety
- Start swallowing therapy, if appropriate

**Please note:** The information contained in this leaflet is designed as a resource for people with swallowing difficulties and is not intended as a substitute for medical advice or the advice of a Speech and Language Therapist.



Féidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



IASLT

## Swallowing Safely when Short of Breath



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## What are swallowing difficulties?

Swallowing difficulties (dysphagia) describe any difficulties or pain with eating, drinking, chewing and/or swallowing.

If food and drinks go down the wrong way into our lungs, this is called aspiration. If food and/or drinks continue to slip down into our lungs, it can lead to chest infections or pneumonia (aspiration pneumonia).



## How are swallowing and breathing related?

We naturally hold our breath when we swallow. This prevents any food or fluid entering the lungs.

When a person has breathing difficulties, they may have trouble coordinating breathing and swallowing when eating and drinking.



## How is swallowing affected by COPD?

Swallowing difficulties can co-exist with COPD.

People with COPD are prone to swallowing difficulties during exacerbations and during stable periods.

The causes of swallowing difficulties are:

- Disrupted breathing – swallow pattern
- Physical changes (increased fatigue, dry mouth, and reflux).
- Side effects of certain medications

## Warning signs of swallowing difficulties

- Coughing or choking when eating / drinking
- Increased shortness of breath during meals
- Wet or 'gurgly' voice after swallowing
- Sensation of food getting stuck in the throat
- Difficulty chewing food
- Taking much longer to finish meals
- Feeling tired after eating / drinking
- Unexplained weight-loss
- Unexplained temperature or change in sputum colour
- Frequent chest-infections

**IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR SWALLOW, YOU SHOULD INFORM YOUR GP. YOU MAY NEED A REFERRAL TO THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY SERVICE FOR ASSESSMENT OF SWALLOWING.**

## What can I do to help my swallow?

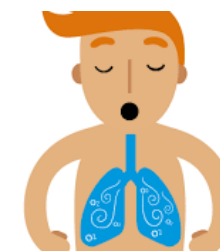
### Eating Environment:

- ✓ **Sit upright** in a supportive chair
- ✓ Do not lie down directly after a meal. **Remain upright** for 30 minutes after eating.
- ✓ **Limit speaking** during meals. This can cause breathlessness and affect swallow safety.
- ✓ If on home **oxygen** – **wear nasal cannulae** when eating and drinking. This will steady oxygen levels and reduce shortness of breath.



### Energy Levels & Eating:

- ✓ Eat large meals earlier in the day
- ✓ Try not to eat when short of breath
- ✓ **Rest before eating** meals to **reduce breathlessness** while swallowing
- ✓ **Allow plenty of time** to swallow and **pause** between mouthfuls.
- ✓ Take time when eating. Sip fluids slowly. Eat slowly. Take small mouthfuls. Alternate between sips of fluids and food.



### Drinking:

- ✓ Take **one sip at a time**. Avoid continuous multiple swallows.