

Swallowing Problems in Adults

What can you do about a swallowing problem?

If you think you may have a swallowing problem, you should contact a health care professional such as:

- local public/community health nurse
- family doctor

Your doctor may ask for a swallowing assessment. A dietitian and speech language pathologist as well as other required professionals would do this.

Based on the assessment you will be given a specific plan to help with your swallowing problem. This may include exercises, positioning, and/or changes to foods/liquids.

Where can you get more information?

For more information please contact your local Western Health office.

Bonne Bay/Port Saunders Area:
458-2211 Extension 261 (Dietitian)
861-3139 Extension 218 (Dietitian)

Corner Brook Area:
637-5374 (Speech-Language Pathologist)

Port aux Basques Area:
695-4523 (Speech-Language Pathologist)
695-4519 (Dietitian)

Stephenville/Burgeo Area:
643-8690 (Speech-Language Pathologist)



OUR VISION

The vision of Western Health is that the people of Western Newfoundland have the highest level of health and well being possible.



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What is a swallowing problem?

Also called dysphagia (“dis FAY juh”), a swallowing problem is difficulty chewing or swallowing foods/liquids. It is not a disease, but can be a symptom of other possible conditions such as:

- stroke
- head injury
- multiple sclerosis
- Parkinson’s
- Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS)
- Alzheimer’s Disease
- depression

What are some signs and symptoms of a swallowing problem?

- Coughing/throat clearing during or right after eating or drinking.
- Wet or gurgly sounding voice during or after eating or drinking.
- Extra time or effort needed to chew or swallow.
- Food or liquid leaking from the mouth/nose.
- Food stays in the mouth too long.
- Feeling of food “stuck” in the mouth and/or throat.
- Avoiding certain foods or refusing to eat.
- Weight loss.
- Low intake of fluids (dehydration).
- Recurring pneumonia, chest infections, or chest congestion after eating.

How can swallowing problems affect you?

You may:

- aspirate (food or liquid goes in the lungs instead of the stomach)
- get pneumonia (if food or liquid goes into your lungs instead of your stomach)
- lose appetite
- lose weight
- get dehydrated
- get water (urinary tract) infections or constipated (if you get dehydrated)
- stop enjoying eating and/or drinking
- feel embarrassed or uncomfortable eating around others