



# Let's Talk

## Swallowing Problems in Adults

“My wife Maria had a stroke and now has trouble eating. When she swallows, some food goes the wrong way, making her cough and choke. She doesn't like to eat now and is losing weight. Her doctors think she should have a tube put in her stomach. My son and I are worried that she won't be able to eat again or join us in our weekly family dinners.”

—Jack

### Are You Having Trouble Eating?

Eating is an important part of life. It is a way to socialize with family and friends. Eating also provides the energy for you to be active. Swallowing problems can make it hard for you to enjoy food or eating in a social situation. Swallowing problems are also called dysphagia (dis-FAY-juh).

### What Causes Swallowing Problems?

Swallowing problems can come from a stroke, brain injury, or a disease like Parkinson's. You can also have problems if you have had cancer in your head or neck.

If you have a swallowing disorder, you may:

- Cough or choke when eating or drinking
- Get food into your airway or lungs (aspiration)
- Need extra time or effort to eat
- Develop pneumonia
- Lose weight or become dehydrated

### Fast facts

- People with swallowing problems may cough or choke or not eat enough.
- Strokes, brain injury, and certain diseases cause swallowing problems.
- Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can help treat swallowing problems.

### How Can a Speech-Language Pathologist Help?

Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with people who have swallowing problems. SLPs can also help if you are having any speech or language problems. SLPs work in hospitals, clinics, private offices, and nursing homes, and can even come to your home. Your SLP will find out what is wrong with your swallow and try to help make it better.



## Swallowing Problems in Adults

### What Happens During a Swallowing Evaluation?

Your SLP will talk with you about the problems you are having. Your SLP will examine the muscles of your mouth and watch you swallow. You may be asked to try different foods and liquids. This will help your SLP learn about what is happening when you swallow.

You may have other tests to give your SLP more information about your swallow. If you don't understand what is going to happen or why, ask your SLP.

### Will Treatment Make a Difference?

There are many ways to treat swallowing disorders. What works best for one person may not work for someone else. Treatments include:

- Different head and mouth positions to help you swallow safely
- Exercises to help swallowing muscles work better
- Finding a diet of foods and liquids that are easier to swallow

In some cases, it is not safe to eat or drink anything. A feeding tube may be recommended for such severe swallowing problems.

Your SLP may suggest that you see other professionals to help with your swallowing problems. These may include:

- Ear, nose, and throat doctors (ENTs)
- Dietitians
- Gastroenterologists
- Neurologists

“The SLP worked with Maria to practice safer ways to swallow. After a few weeks, Maria was able to eat soft foods and drink small sips of water. The SLP and Maria's doctors believe that she will not need her feeding tube for much longer and will be able to eat with us again soon. I am so glad that the SLP was there to help Maria.” —Jack

### Swallowing problems can change your life. Help is available.

To learn more about swallowing problems or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org) or call 800-638-8255 or TTY-301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

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Appointment

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and