

How to Treat Swallowing Problems after Stroke

December 31, 2015



Swallowing problems after stroke are a result of the condition *dysphagia*, which can make movements involving your throat muscles difficult. Here's what you should know about dysphagia.

What Causes Swallowing Problems In the First Place?

Swallowing problems after stroke are often a result of damage in the area of your brain responsible for controlling your throat muscles. Depending on the severity of the condition, your doctor may recommend a feeding tube. In other cases, **dysphagia may go away on its own in just a few weeks**. Your [speech-language pathologist](#) will recommend a course of action.

How to Know If You Have Swallowing Problems

Some symptoms of dysphagia are:

- Difficulty starting to swallow
- Coughing or gagging while swallowing
- Food or drink getting into the lungs (also called 'aspirations')
- Drooling
- Weak voice

- Affected tongue control
- Lost gag reflex

These symptoms should be taken very seriously, and your speech-language pathologist will help you deal with your specific symptoms. Here are some extra tips to increase your safety while eating and drinking.

Simple Tips to Make Things Easier

Eat soft foods. They are easier to chew and reduce your chance of choking. Refer to this [really long list of soft foods](#) and find creative ways of getting them into your diet.

Drink thick liquids. Thin beverages move quickly through your throat, and dysphagia might prevent your throat from sealing off the path to your lungs in time – leading to aspirations. This can be prevented by using liquid thickeners that make your hot and cold beverages safer to drink. You can also try some healthy fruit smoothies, which are loaded with [stroke-preventing vitamin C](#).

Sit as tall as you can. When you sit up straight, your throat is in a much better position to allow food and beverages to go down with ease. If you have trouble sitting up straight, here are some [balance exercises](#) to help.

Become a mindful eater. Take your time and take small bites and sips. Eating or drinking too fast often causes choking or aspirations, and it can easily be avoided by *slowing down*. Be mindful of each bite and sip. *Enjoy your food*. This is the perfect opportunity to [become a mindful eater](#).

Mistakes to AVOID

Don't drink out of a straw unless your speech-language pathologist told you it's safe. It might seem like a good idea but there could be other factors going on that you're unaware of.

Never eat or drink while lying down. This is just asking for trouble.

Avoid foods that have varying consistencies. For example, don't choose soups that have large chunks in them. Instead, opt for a pureed soup.

Don't multitask while you're eating or drinking. Don't talk with your mouth full of food and don't try and do something while you're drinking. Simply focus on the task at hand. This will minimize any potential problems.

Final Thoughts

Your speech-language pathologist will continuously monitor your dysphagia as you proceed with your stroke recovery. Always exercise caution – this is your life we're talking about – and don't push things when you're unsure. *Slow and steady wins this race*.