# Swallowing Problems

**If the muscles of your mouth, tongue, or throat are not working well, you may have trouble swallowing foods or liquids**. The name of this problem is **dysphagia** (dis-FAY-juh). Dysphagia can cause foods and/or liquids to go down the "wrong way" and get into your voice box or windpipe. This can make you cough or choke. It can also go farther down, into your lungs, and give you pneumonia. Even tiny bits of food or liquid going into the lungs can cause pneumonia.

Sometimes people do not feel things going down the wrong way – they don't cough or choke or even know there is a problem. Sometimes the only way they realize they have a swallowing problem is because they get pneumonia.

## Some causes of swallowing problems are:

- Stroke
- Head & neck cancer
- Surgery
- Chronic Reflux
- Aging

Some people only have trouble swallowing thin liquids, like water or coffee. Some have trouble swallowing thicker foods, like mashed potatoes, or solid foods, like steak.

## Tell your doctor if you:

- Have problems controlling the food or liquid in your mouth.
- Have problems controlling your saliva (drooling).
- Cough during or after eating or drinking.
- Feel as if food or liquid is "left over" in your throat after you swallow.
- Get pneumonia or get it more than once.
- Lose weight (without trying).
- Notice that your voice sounds "wet" or "gurgly."
- Find pieces of food in your mouth after you finish eating.

Your doctor may ask your speech pathologist to meet with you. The speech pathologist will do tests to help decide what foods and liquids are safe for you.

The speech pathologist may teach you a different way to swallow or safer positions for eating or drinking. You may also learn special exercises to help make your swallow stronger and safer.

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