

Eating and Drinking Difficulties

Difficulties with swallowing food and/or drinks is known as 'dysphagia'. Dysphagia can be caused by the following:

- Complex medical conditions
- Developmental Disability
- Neuromuscular Coordination
- Genetic Syndromes
- Medication Side Effects
- Neurological Disorders
- Sensory Issues
- Structural Abnormality
- Behavioural factors
- Social-emotional factors



Signs of Dysphagia

- Coughing or choking before swallowing
- Breathing difficulties when feeding
- Back Arching
- Gagging
- Loss of food/liquid from mouth during mealtime
- Difficulty chewing foods at age-appropriate level
- Noisy or wet vocal quality following eating
- Extended time required for mealtimes

How can Speech and Language Therapists help?

We often work with colleagues of different professions for example, Dieticians, Occupational Therapists, Paediatricians and Physiotherapists to:

- Assess a child's swallowing difficulties
- Improve safe swallow function
- Improve nutritional intake
- Provide tips for making mealtimes easier at home
- Implement feeding/swallowing techniques
- Development treatment plans based on each individual child's needs

Top Tips to support with eating and drinking:

1. Always ensure your child is in an upright position for safe eating and drinking
2. Have fun with food. The messier the better!
3. Introduce one new taste per week.
4. Introduce a small amount of food at a time
5. Don't make where the child is eating the focus of attention
6. Make neutral comments i.e., don't show your feelings if the child tries or doesn't try it.
7. Reduce the number of foods the child can choose from.
8. Ensure there are minimal distractions at mealtimes
9. Ensure consistency between feeders, i.e., mum and dad do the same thing.
10. If your child likes to have a toy while eating, have specific toys for this time



If you have concerns:

If you are concerned about the development of your child's eating and drinking skills, please speak to your health visitor or another medical practitioner. They may be able to offer you advice and support. They can also refer on to the Speech and Language Therapy team if they feel this is appropriate. If you are struggling to access advice, please contact our team via email at cpm-tr.SLTmailforparents@nhs.net

For more information about how to refer please see our referrals page: [Referrals and Early Advice Sessions: Children's Speech and Language Therapy | CPFT NHS Trust](#)