

What is Dysphagia?

Dysphagia is the medical term for a **swallowing difficulty**. Dysphagia can happen at any or all stages of the swallow. There may be a problem chewing food or sipping drinks (oral stage), swallowing (pharyngeal stage) and/or passing the food to the stomach (oesophageal stage).

What causes dysphagia?

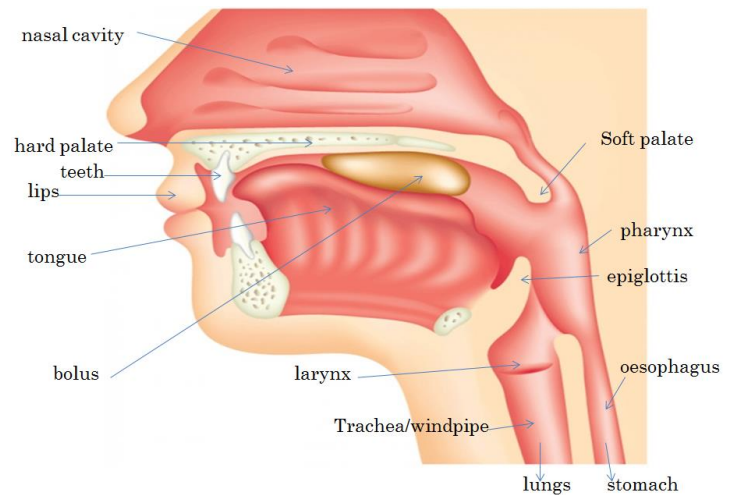
Some of the possible causes of dysphagia among children are:

- Developmental delay
- Neurological conditions, e.g. Cerebral Palsy
- Genetic syndromes, e.g. Down Syndrome
- Being born prematurely
- Cleft lip and/or palate
- It may also occur in children without risk factors

This picture shows the parts of the mouth and throat that need to work together (teeth, tongue, oesophagus, larynx etc.) to eat and drink safely. When swallowing is difficult, sometimes there is a risk of **aspiration**.

Aspiration

Aspiration is when food/drink enters the lungs. This can happen before, during or after the swallow.



Signs of aspiration include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak or absent cough • Choking or an inability to speak • Wet sounding speech or vocalisations • Watery eyes • Changes in breathing • Significant weight loss without cause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coughing or gagging during or after a meal • Gurgling sounds while breathing • Change of facial expression (eye blinking) • Sudden sweating • History of chest infections/pneumonia • Very slow eating (more than half an hour)
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How is dysphagia managed?

If your child has eating and drinking difficulties, a Speech and Language Therapist will assess their feeding and offer advice. Advice may include adjustments to the following:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food preparation and texture • Size of each mouthful • Thickness of drinks, using thickener • Speed or pace of feeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning of the child for eating/drinking • Support with bottle feeding • Support with chewing and self-feeding • Signs to look out for to reduce aspiration
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Speech and Language Therapists often work with a team of professionals to help your child's eating and drinking. Other professionals might include Dietitians, Occupational Therapists, and/or Paediatricians. If you have any concerns, please contact stgh-tr.wandscomfeedingservice@nhs.net