

# Fact Sheet:

## Difficulties with Swallowing

In speech pathology, “dysphagia” is used to describe swallowing difficulties, and can affect the ability to safely and efficiently eat and drink. Dysphagia can occur after stroke, brain injury, conditions such as Parkinson’s disease or dementia, or due to age-related changes.

### Signs of dysphagia

Some signs of dysphagia can include:

- Coughing, choking, or gagging when eating or drinking.
- Wet, gurgly, or hoarse voice during or after swallowing.
- Avoiding certain foods or textures.
- Longer mealtimes than usual.
- Recurrent chest infections or food “going down the wrong way.”
- Weight loss or dehydration.

### How can a speech pathologist help?

- Assess swallowing safety and efficiency.
- Recommend safe foods and fluids and adjust food textures if needed.
- Teach strategies to improve swallowing safety and reduce risk.
- Work with families or carers to support safe mealtimes.

### General strategies

- Sit upright at 90° when eating and drinking and remain upright for 20–30 minutes after eating.
- Take small bites and sips and take your time during meals.
- Concentrate when swallowing (e.g. avoid talking when chewing or swallowing).
- Alternate bites of food with sips of water.

### When should you seek support?

If you are noticing any of the above signs in yourself or others, or have other concerns about your swallowing, it is best to seek guidance from a speech pathologist.

**For more information** contact Benalla Health on (03) 5761 4500 to speak to a speech pathologist.