

Acute care Adult dysphagia pathway

What is dysphagia?

- Dysphagia is the word used to describe difficulties when eating, drinking or swallowing.
- Dysphagia can be very serious and cause chest infections and pneumonia, weight loss, malnutrition and dehydration.
- Dysphagia should not be ignored.



Acute care - Adult dysphagia pathway

Risk factors

- Muscle tone changes
- Stroke
- Acquired/traumatic brain injury
- Cardiac difficulties
- Gastroesophageal difficulties/ reflux
- Known diagnoses, e.g. Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy
- Craniofacial issues
- Airway/respiratory difficulties
- Tracheostomy
- Burns
- Dementia
- Progressive conditions, e.g. Moto Neuro Disease, Parkinson's
- Change in health/mental health
- Transitions

Possible symptoms - during and/or immediately after food and drink

- Gagging
- Coughing
- Choking
- Watery eyes
- Facial colour change
- Wet voice quality
- Wet breath sounds
- Chestiness/Lower respiratory tract infection
- Refusal/distress behaviours
- Self-report of struggle
- Poor weight gain/loss
- Carer concern
- Dehydration
- Poor medication compliance
- Loss of food from mouth, taking a long time to eat a meal
- Coughing when or immediately after eating or drinking

Dysphagia suspected

Refer directly to appropriate Adult Speech and Language Therapy Service for assessment

MDT to consider

- Positioning
- Food texture
- Nutrition and hydration
- Referral to Dietetics
- Referral to Gastroenterology
- Referral to allergy service
- Need for enteral feeding