

# Acute care Paediatric 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 - Paediatric dysphagia pathway

## Risk factors

- Prematurity
- Low birth weight
- Muscle tone changes
- Cardiac difficulties
- Gastroesophageal reflux
- Known diagnoses, e.g. Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy
- Craniofacial issues
- Tracheostomy
- Airway/respiratory difficulties, eg. laryngomalacia
- Sensory difficulties
- [Dysphagia - guidance | RCSLT](#)

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

- Gagging
- Coughing
- Choking
- Poor/absent suck
- Watery eyes
- Facial colour change
- Wet voice quality
- Wet breath sounds
- Chestiness/LRTI
- Refusal behaviours
- Distress behaviours
- Self-report of struggle
- Poor weight gain/loss
- Not meeting volumes
- 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 Paediatric Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) 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