

Learning Disability Dysphagia Diamond Standards: Families, Carers and Social Care Adult

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.



Adult family and carer pathway: How to identify dysphagia and seek support

Notice if choking, recurrent chest infections (more than 2 courses of antibiotics in 12 month period), wet and or gurgling voice after drinking and other symptoms eg. weight loss (triangulate with the other pathways re symptoms)

Symptoms: during and/or immediately after food and drink

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

If you notice any one of these symptoms this could indicate dysphagia and please seek support and advice from your GP/learning disability team/speech and language therapist (SALT)/other doctor eg. paediatrician if involved.

Please complete the screening questions to gather more information and take with you to your appointment, about whether the person may have dysphagia' at the end of the pathway

Adult Dysphagia Screening Questions

These questions refer to the person with a learning disability. They may be answered by someone who knows them well if the person is not able to respond themselves.

Question	Record answers
Do you regularly cough during or after eating or drinking?	
Do you have difficulties with swallowing food or drink? (Prompts: pain, struggle, effort, refusal, distress, agitation, food getting stuck)	
Have you had a choking incident in the last 12 months? (Prompts: something got stuck in your throat and you had to cough very hard to get it out, or you needed help, e.g. back slaps)	
Do you get regular chest infections? (Prompt: more than 2 chest infections in the last 6 months)	
Do you get a lot of urine infections?	
Have you lost weight without meaning to, or do you have a low weight? (Prompt: low BMI)	
Do difficulties with eating and drinking impact on your quality of life?	

Adult Dysphagia Screening Questions

In addition it is very useful for differential diagnosis to know if the person has a degenerative condition and if reflux a factor for this person.

Question	Record answers
Do you have difficulties with swallowing food or drink? (Prompts: pain, struggle, effort, refusal, distress, agitation, food getting stuck)	
Have you had a choking incident in the last 12 months? (Prompts: something got stuck in your throat and you had to cough very hard to get it out, or you needed help, eg back slaps)	
Do you regularly cough during or after eating or drinking?	
Do you get regular chest infections? (Prompt: more than 2 chest infections in the last 6 months)	
Do difficulties with eating and drinking impact on your quality of life?	
Have you lost weight without meaning to, or do you have a low weight? (Prompt: low BMI)	
Do you find it a problem getting enough to drink? (Prompt: If yes, why? (eg. difficulties making a drink, difficulties holding the cup and drinking, urine infections)	