

Primary Care Children's 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.



Primary Care - Children's dysphagia pathway

Risk factors

- Prematurity
- Low birth weight
- Hypotonia, any disorder of muscle tone
- Recurrent chest infection
- Cow's milk protein allergy which is not settling with the treatment given
- Syndromes eg. Downs Syndrome
- Tube fed
- Failure to thrive
- Sensory perception difficulties
- Obesity
- Medications which cause dysphagia such as antiepileptics
- Sensory difficulties, Dysphagia - guidance | RCSLT

Possible symptoms

- Vomiting/regurgitation of feeds
- Poor weight gain
- Crying, inconsolable
- Refusing of feeds
- Blood in poos or vomit
- Poor chewing
- Chesty wheezy unexplained cough
- Waterbrash
- Sore tummy
- Recurrent chest infection
- Dehydration
- Nutritional compromise
- Increase in behaviours which challenge around mealtimes
- Possible choking incident
- New swallowing difficulty
- Loss of food, taking a long time to eat a meal
- Coughing when or immediately after eating or drinking

Dysphagia suspected

If acutely unwell admit to acute paediatrics

If not acutely unwell urgently

- Refer appropriate community speech and language therapy team (SALT)
- Refer appropriate community dietician
- Refer to community paediatrics

- Consider Paediatric gastroenterology
- Consider ENT
- Consider learning disability team and multiagency working

Dysphagia Screening Questions

In addition it is very useful for differential diagnosis to know if the person has a degenerative condition and if reflux is 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: reduced mobility, dexterity etc. and needing help with ADL or history recurrent urine infections)	
Have you already received any advice for your eating and drinking difficulty?	