

## Swallowing difficulties (dysphagia)

You have been referred to the speech and language therapy service at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead. This leaflet explains what to expect from speech and language therapy and what you can do whilst you are waiting for your appointment.

## What are swallowing difficulties?

**Swallowing difficulties** are problems with eating, drinking or swallowing. The medical term for a swallowing difficulty is dysphagia.

Signs of a swallowing problem may include;

- Coughing/choking
- Throat clearing
- Wet, gurgly sounding voice
- Shortness of breath during or after eating
- Eyes watering during or after eating
- Difficulties chewing or clearing foods from the mouth
- Reports of food stuck in throat

## What to expect from your speech and language therapy appointment

We offer assessment, specific advice and targeted therapy tailored to your needs. A strong emphasis is also placed upon providing close liaison and support to family and carers.

We are able to offer outpatient appointments at the hospital or home visits.

We will contact you with an appointment as soon as possible. During your initial appointment, we will ask you relevant questions about your medical condition(s) and the symptoms that you are experiencing.

Your speech and language therapist will ask you to eat and/or drink small amounts of food and drink whilst observing the swallow. If there are particular foods or fluids which you find difficult, please let your speech and language therapist know and, if you can, bring these along to your appointment.

Once we have completed our initial assessment, we will explain what might be causing these difficulties and discuss ways to help the swallow. This may include changing the diet or fluid consistency, strategies or exercises.

## Helpful advice to consider whilst awaiting your speech and language therapy appointment

The following advice may help reduce the risks of swallowing difficulties:

- When eating or drinking, sit up straight if possible, ideally in a chair or at a 90° angle in bed. If possible, remain in this position for approximately 30 minutes after eating and drinking
- Make sure your head is well supported in a neutral, midline position when eating and drinking. You may need extra pillows, a supportive headrest or a rolled up towel behind your neck to help with this
- Clean teeth/dentures and mouth at least twice daily. The mouth may need to be checked and cleaned to remove any food debris after meals
- Dentures should be removed overnight and cleaned in a suitable solution
- Choose a quiet dining environment and avoid distractions like the TV
- Try not to talk whilst eating & drinking
- Take time over meals
- Try smaller meals with regular snacks
- Don't overfill your mouth and do pause between mouthfuls

## Contact us

For more information about our community speech and language therapy (SLT) services or if your circumstances have changed since you were referred, then please contact the team on:

01342 414471

qvh.salt@nhs.net

## Outpatient speech and language therapy at QVH

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Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or a different format.

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