

# Oesophageal Dysphagia - Strategies to support eating and drinking

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**Oesophageal dysphagia** describes difficulties with eating, drinking and swallowing as a result of a problem occurring at the level of the oesophagus (or “food pipe”). There are many possible causes for oesophageal dysphagia including:

**Oesophageal dysmotility** occurs when contractions in the oesophagus become irregular, unsynchronised or absent. This means food is not moved smoothly through the oesophagus.

**Oesophageal spasm** is a sudden, abnormal clenching of the oesophagus. This can prevent food from moving through the oesophagus.

## Symptoms may include:

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- A ‘sticking’ sensation when eating or drinking
- Discomfort when eating
- Coughing when eating
- Regurgitation (food coming back up)
- Heartburn
- Bad breath and / or unpleasant taste in mouth
- Persistent irritable cough or need to throat clear
- Weight Loss

## Strategies to support ease / comfort of eating and drinking:

- Choose naturally soft, moist food (add sauces)
- Mash or liquidise food
- Avoid bread, tough meats, and other ‘stodgy foods’ e.g. potato
- Avoid acidic foods e.g. citrus fruits, tomatoes
- Avoid acidic drinks e.g. juice, fizzy drinks
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes

## Strategies when eating:

- Take an extra swallow of your saliva in between each mouthful
- Try taking small sips of drink between mouthfuls of food
- Eat slowly and take small mouthfuls
- Eat smaller meals more frequently throughout the day

- Chew your food well before swallowing
- Sit upright when eating and stay sitting upright for approximately 30 minutes after meals
- Don't eat late in the evening (try to eat 2 hours before bed)
- Don't eat immediately before exercise
- Make sure you keep your teeth and mouth clean
- Consider adding extra sauces to your foods to help moisten them e.g.: gravy, cream or custard

## Maximising your nutrition:

- If you are losing weight try fortifying your meals to add in extra calories:

1. Fortify your food	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add butter, olive oil, or mayonnaise to sandwiches, salads, or potatoes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>These approaches will increase the calories and protein in each serving of your meals, without needing to increase your portion size.</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose full fat milk, cream, cheese and full sugar foods.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add cheese to soups, mashed potato, curry and pasta dishes, scrambled egg.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add cream or condensed milk to puddings.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add extra 'skimmed milk powder' to full fat milk to further increase nutrition. Use this milk on cereal, in puddings and hot drinks and soups/mashed potato.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Add 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder to 1 pint of full cream milk. You can buy skimmed milk powder at most supermarkets.</b></p>

- Have smaller, more frequent meals and snacks e.g 3 meals with 2-3 additional snacks each day
- Have puddings with your meals
- Complan and Meritene shakes or soups are a good way of improving your energy and protein intake. Take them between meals to avoid them filling you up at meal times. They are available to buy from both supermarkets and pharmacies.
- Monitor your weight and seek further health professional advice if needed. A referral to dietetics may be required

## Contact Details:

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