

## **Safe eating, drinking, and swallowing techniques to support patients prior to SLT assessment:**

Dysphagia is the medical term for swallowing difficulties. Difficulties swallowing can cause and increased risk of food, fluids and saliva entering the lungs (aspiration). When other risk factors are present dysphagia, and aspiration can cause ill health.

A range of strategies may help with swallowing and reduce the risk of aspiration. This leaflet is designed to provide general advice on safer feeding techniques and should not replace any specific professional recommendations. People with swallowing difficulties should be referred to a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) for personalised advice. This video also covers these techniques:  
<https://vimeo.com/346163136/1705a16ee9>

- Make sure the person is awake and alert when eating and drinking
- Ensure hearing aids and glasses are worn so the person so hear prompts and see the food and drinks
- Make sure the person is sitting as upright as possible when eating and drinking, with head straight and chin level or lightly down. Uses cushions or pillows for support if needed.
- To reduce the risk of reflux the person should remain semi-upright for at least 30 minutes after eating and drinking.
- Give all food and drink in a quiet room free of distraction (TV/radio off).
- Don't talk to the person while they have food or drink in their mouth, wait for them to clear their mouth before talking. Be comfortable with silence.
- People supporting with eating and drinking should sit at the same level or lower than the person being supported and make eye contact.
- Encourage the person to feed themselves wherever possible or use hand over hand feeding.
- Tell the person what the food and drink is and make sure they can see their food. Food should look and smell appetising, try to avoid mixing foods unnecessarily.
- Remind the person to chew and swallow (say "swallow" or gently touch their mouth or face)
- Make sure people have swallowed one mouthful and cleared their mouth before having the next mouthful. Allow time for a second "clearing" swallow if needed.
- Give small mouthfuls using a teaspoon
- Offer sips of drink between food
- Use an open or cutaway cup – spouts and straws increase the risk of aspiration for people with swallowing difficulties
- Eating and drinking safely may take a long time, so make sure sufficient time is allowed for meals and drinks. If food and drinks go cold try using insulated ups or plates or heat several smaller servings