NHS
Calderdale and Huddersfield
NHS Foundation Trust

Speech and Language Therapy

Eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties in Dementia

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Some people with dementia have difficulties eating, drinking and swallowing.

Here are some common problems:

- Not recognising food, drinks or cutlery
- Holding food in the mouth (pouching)
- Spitting out lumps
- Eating too quickly / slowly
- Putting too much in the mouth
- Refusing food / drink
- Eating small amounts / poor appetite
- Talking with food or drink in the mouth
- Forgetting to swallow
- Difficulty swallowing tablets (consult GP/Pharmacist)
- Drooling (consult GP/Pharmacist if excessive)

Warning signs can include:

- Difficulty chewing / moving food in the mouth
- Wet or gurgly voice after swallowing
- Coughing during/after eating / drinking
- Chestiness or lots of chest infections
- Weight loss
- Eating things that are not food (known as “PICA”)

compassionate care

Changes to the texture of food or fluids should only be made with professional advice.

If you have concerns about a patient's ability to swallow, contact the Speech and Language Therapy service or GP.

Before eating or drinking check



- The person is alert
- They are sitting as upright as possible and stay upright for 30 minutes after finishing
- They are wearing their glasses and hearing aids (if used)
- They have good fitting dentures (if used)
- They have a clean mouth "Oral hygiene" (mouth and dentures should be cleaned at least twice a day)
- If they need the toilet
- The food and drink is the right temperature
- What they like and dislike with family / carers / friends

How you can help with eating and drinking

- Sit **facing** the person or slightly to their 'good' side
- Make **eye contact**
- Use a **gentle tone of voice**
- Be **calm** - never rush the person
- Try **helping with the first mouthful**, then **encourage the person to feed themselves**
- Try **adaptive equipment** (consult Occupational Therapy)
- Remind the person what they are eating and **chat about the food**
- Give **swallow reminders** - if the person holds food in their mouth, prompt them or gesture chewing and swallowing
- Try offering an **empty spoon** between mouthfuls to encourage a swallow
- **Allow time** for more than one swallow per mouthful
- **Don't** give the next mouthful until they have an **empty mouth**



Don't use straws or spouted beakers or other cups that encourage a person to tip their head back



- If a person is spitting out try **smoother, softer** foods
- Try **sour flavours / cold food and drink** which may help to get a swallow
- Try **"finger foods"** (of the recommended texture) so the person can eat without help
- **Help, don't force**
- Make sure all staff are trained and feel confident about helping with eating and drinking
- Cut food into **small pieces** (do this away from the person's view)
- **Lay the table** with tablecloth so the person can see things easily (contrasting colours can help)
- **Never mix** the food on the plate - keep things separate. Try moulds to shape food (if available)
- Put **one course** at a time in front of the person. Leave other courses until they are ready
- If the person is cramming food into their mouth, gently encourage them to **pause**

Support and Independence Team
Beechwood Community Health Centre
60B Keighley Road
Halifax, HX2 8AL
Tel: 01422 393000 for referrals via Gateway to Care

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Specialist Speech and Language Therapist
Community Rehabilitation Team
Beechwood Community Health Centre
Telephone No: 01422 358146

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

ਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਪ੍ਰਾਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ,
ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

اگر آپ کو ی معلومات کسی اور فارمٹ یا زبان میں درکار ہوں، تو
برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں.

"إذا احتجت الحصول على هذه المعلومة بشكل مغاير أو مترجمة إلى لغة مختلفة فيرجى منك الاتصال بالقسم المذكور أعلاه"