



# Managing Swallowing Difficulties

## Did You Know?

There are quite a few foods that can be enjoyed just the way they are, even if you have to follow a ground or pureed diet. Here are some examples:

- Cream of wheat
- Cream of rice
- Yogurt (without fruit)
- Applesauce
- Mashed potatoes
- Mashed sweet potatoes
- Pudding
- Ice cream\*
- Milkshakes\*
- Gelatin desserts\*

\*may not be safe for those on thickened liquids



Trouble swallowing, or “dysphagia,” can occur at any age, but it is most common in older adults. Some potential causes of this are a stroke, muscle disorders such as multiple sclerosis or Parkinson’s, cancer, or damage from chronic reflux disease (heartburn). It is also very common in older adults with dementia.

A speech language pathologist or “speech therapist” works with individuals to improve chewing and swallowing, and determines the safest diet texture. Treatment might include ground or pureed food, and sometimes even thickened liquids.

## Health risks of swallowing difficulties (dysphagia)

- **Aspiration-** Food or liquid is inhaled into the lungs.
- **Aspiration Pneumonia-** An infection develops after aspiration occurs, which can lead to death.
- **Dehydration-** This risk is especially high if a person dislikes thickened liquids, or needs assistance to drink.
- **Decreased quality of life-** Trouble swallowing can make eating both exhausting and less enjoyable. It can also be hard to get used to a new diet or liquid texture.
- **Weight loss-** This is often due to difficulty getting enough calories.

## Helpful Hints

It is important to follow the diet texture as recommended by your physician or speech therapist, but here are some general tips:

- Make sure your food tastes good! This may seem like common sense, but extra flavor can really help. Try extra herbs, spices, gravy, or sauces.
- Keep things colorful and distinct. Pureed chicken next to mashed sweet potatoes and pureed green beans will look a lot nicer than a bowl of pureed casserole.
- Variety is essential. Instant mashed potatoes may be easy, but they sure get boring after a while! Try adding new flavors (garlic, sour cream and chive), or grind/puree foods ahead and freeze them to decrease prep time and have more variety on hand. Adjust the texture as needed when you reheat them.

Swallowing difficulties can be frustrating, but managing them well can drastically improve your overall health.