

Dysphagia

What is Dysphagia?

Dysphagia is the medical term for swallowing difficulties. Dysphagia may result in food and/or fluids entering the airway while eating and drinking (i.e. aspiration). Dysphagia is often the result of medical conditions that weaken or damage muscles and nerves involved in the swallowing process.

Common Causes of Dysphagia

- Stroke
- Traumatic brain injury
- Progressive neurological diseases, e.g. Parkinson's disease, motor neuron disease, dementia
- Head and neck cancers, e.g. tongue or mouth cancer, nasopharyngeal cancer
- Respiratory conditions, e.g. chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- General ageing

Signs of Dysphagia

- Coughing, throat clearing, choking, or wet/gurgly voicing while eating or drinking
- Drooling
- Difficulties chewing harder types of food
- Increased time or effort to initiate a swallow
- Food/drinks left over in the mouth after swallows
- Feeling of food getting stuck in the throat/chest
- Prolonged mealtimes

Dysphagia may lead to:

- Recurrent chest infections (pneumonia)
- Unintentional weight loss
- Malnutrition and dehydration
- Loss of the ability to enjoy food/drinks as before

Safe Feeding Strategies

- Ensure that the person is alert and sitting upright
- Remove distractions in the environment
- Ensure that the person eats or drinks slowly
- Ensure that the person has swallowed before giving the next spoonful
- Remind the person not to talk while eating or drinking
- Ensure there is no food or drink remaining in the mouth after each swallow
- Allow the person to rest if he/she is short of breath
- Prompt the person to cough or clear their throat if you hear that his or her voice has become wet/gurgly-sounding
- Continue to sit upright for at least 20 minutes after each meal
- Maintaining good oral hygiene is also important. Ensure that the person's mouth (gums, teeth and tongue) is cleaned at least twice a day

You should seek a doctor or speech therapist's advice if you observe frequent and persistent coughing, throat clearing, or choking when the person is eating or drinking. If you are concerned that you or your loved one may have dysphagia, do seek medical attention immediately.

How Can A Speech Therapist Help?

Speech therapists assess and manage swallowing difficulties in patients.

A swallowing assessment may include:

- Taking a detailed medical history and information related to swallowing
- Assessing the muscles or nerves involved in swallowing
- Observing the patient when eating or drinking
- A swallowing x-ray or nasendoscope to view the swallowing process in real time

Management or treatment of dysphagia may include:

- Modifications to diet and fluid consistencies
- Strategies to ensure safety while eating or drinking
- Implementing targeted swallowing exercises and/or swallow therapy programmes

Speech Therapy

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Guide for Patients with Dysphagia

The following diet and fluid modifications are recommended to minimise the risks of aspiration when eating/drinking.

Diet Modifications

Regular

- All food textures allowed
- Pieces may be larger than 1.5 cm
- Includes hard, tough, chewy, fibrous, stringy, dry, crispy, crunchy or crumbly bits



Easy to chew

- Soft and tender
- Easily cut up with pressure from side of fork/spoon e.g. fish, tofu, soft bread



Soft & bite-sized

- Soft, tender and moist
- Bite-sized pieces no larger than 1.5 x 1.5 cm



Minced & moist

- Soft, moist and minced food.
- Small lumps visible within the food that are $\leq 0.4\text{cm}$ in diameter.
- Easily mashed with little pressure from a fork.



Liquidised/Pureed


- Fully blended
- Smooth, lump-free and non-sticky food
- Does not require biting/chewing (e.g. mashed potato)



Fluid Modifications

The following are basic guidelines for thickening fluids (e.g. water, coffee, milo) excluding oral nutritional supplements using Resource ThickenUP Clear. Please check with your speech therapist if you are using other brands of thickeners.

To minimise formation of clumps, please stir quickly after mixing the fluid and thickener.

Fluids Consistency	Resource ThickenUP Clear 
Slightly Thick (Level 1)	Mix 1 scoop* to 200ml of clear liquid
Mildly Thick (Level 2)	Mix 2 scoops* to 200ml of clear liquid
Moderately Thick (Level 3)	Mix 4 scoops* to 200ml of clear liquid
Extremely Thick (Level 4)	Mix 6 scoops* to 200ml of clear liquid

***Please use the scoop that comes with the thickener**

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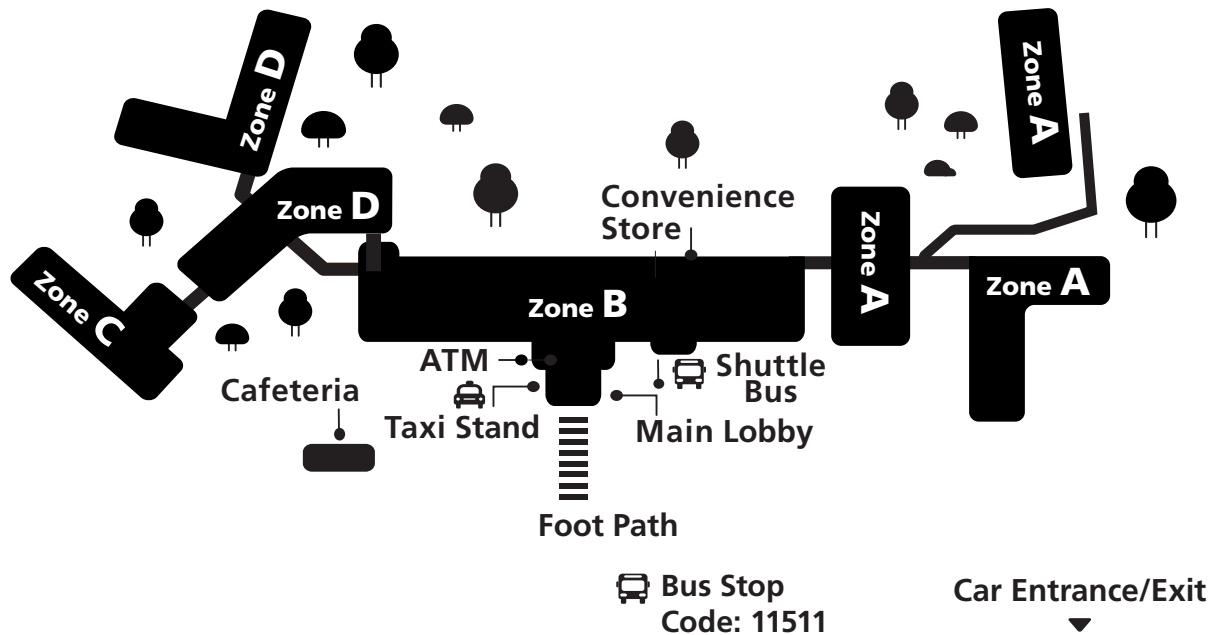
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