

# DYSPHAGIA:

[dis-fey-juh, -jee-uh] noun,  
1. difficulty in swallowing.



## WHAT IT IS:

Dysphagia is the medical term for difficulty swallowing or paralysis of the throat muscles. This condition can make eating, drinking, taking medicine and breathing difficult. Many stroke survivors experience dysphagia or trouble swallowing at some point after a stroke. Difficulty swallowing is most common immediately after a stroke.

## TIPS TO LIVING WITH DYSPHAGIA:

### DIETARY CHANGES



Dietary changes may be necessary in order to effectively manage your dysphagia

### CHANGING TEXTURE OR THICKNESS OF FOOD



You may be able to chew and swallow smaller pieces so chopping, mincing or pureeing food may make it easier for you to eat. Food should be prepared and consumed correctly to avoid inhaling into the lungs.

## TREATMENT

### THERAPY



The most common treatment for difficulty swallowing is swallow therapy done with the help of a speech language, occupational, or physical therapist.

Some stroke survivors may be candidates for Neuromuscular Electrical Stimulation (NMES). If you show signs of aspiration or have difficulty managing your diet, you may be a candidate for this type of dysphagia therapy.

### EXERCISE



Exercising the tongue, lips, throat, and mouth can help relax and strengthen the muscles as well as increase their flexibility (examples include tucking the chin or rotating the head).

A speech language therapist can teach special exercises and techniques to stimulate the nerves involved in swallowing. These can include changing posture and sitting position, reducing distractions at mealtime, eating slower with smaller amounts of food, and changing food texture.

Some medications, such as muscle relaxers, can help open the throat and make swallowing easier.

## COMPLICATIONS

Dysphagia can lead to malnutrition and dehydration. Patients who suffer from dysphagia can develop respiratory problems, such as pneumonia or respiratory infections, due to the inhalation of food or liquids.



To learn more about dysphagia, visit:  
[stroke.org/dysphagia](https://stroke.org/dysphagia)

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