

Parkinson's – advice for swallowing difficulties

People with Parkinson's, or related conditions, often have problems with chewing and swallowing.

Not everyone with Parkinson's will develop swallowing difficulties, but for those who do, the problem can range from being fairly minor, with little effect on everyday life, to causing major difficulties.

Speech and language therapists are specially trained to assess and deal with your swallowing difficulties.

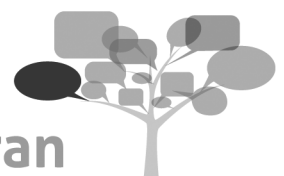
Swallowing problems may include:

- coughing or choking when you are eating or drinking
- difficulty opening your mouth properly, and slow or difficult chewing
- food sitting in your mouth for a while because it is difficult to start a swallow
- food sticking in your throat
- taking longer to finish meals, and getting tired while eating
- avoiding some foods, like meat or crisps, because they are difficult to eat
- difficulty swallowing tablets
- saliva collecting in your mouth, which may cause drooling
- dry mouth as a result of some medications

What can you do to help?

1. Speak to the speech and language therapist, who will assess your swallow, and give advice tailored to your individual needs.
2. General advice for mealtimes:
 - Avoid all distractions (TV, radio, books, papers) and concentrate only on eating.
 - Try to sit in a relaxed, upright position, ideally with your chin tucked down slightly.
 - If you get easily tired, try having more frequent, smaller meals.
 - You may find it easier to eat and drink at times when you feel the most benefit from your medication.
3. While eating:
 - Cut your food up into small pieces, and take small mouthfuls.
 - Eat slowly, and chew food well before swallowing.
 - Make sure your mouth is clear of food before you take another mouthful.
 - Take a drink of water, juice or milk in between mouthfuls, to help food go down.

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4. When drinking:

- Do not rush and gulp your drink down – take small sips.
- Never swallow with your head tilted back.
- Fluids sometimes need to be thickened with a thickening agent. Your speech and language therapist will advise on this.

5. If taking tablets is difficult:

- Try taking them with a drink of water, juice or milk.
- It might be easier with a spoonful of yoghurt or porridge (check with your pharmacist as some medication can't be taken with certain foods).

- If required, speak to your doctor about whether your tablets are available in another form – for example, in liquid form.

6. If drooling is a problem:

- Keep your head in an upright position.
- Keep your lips together when not talking.
- Keep your lips closed when chewing or swallowing food or drink.
- Try to make a conscious effort to swallow your saliva regularly, and before opening your mouth to eat or speak.

Speech and Language Therapist: _____

Telephone number: _____

Notes

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