

# Tips to Eat and Swallow Safely

When your swallowing muscles are weak, food and fluids may not move properly from your mouth down to your stomach.

Food, fluid, and saliva can get into your airway or lungs and cause coughing, choking, or a chest infection. People with swallowing problems need to be careful when eating.

Your swallowing team may include the following healthcare professionals:

- speech-language pathologist
- dietitian
- occupational therapist
- nurse
- physician

## The tips below will help:

- Eat when rested and at your best.
- Eat small meals and snacks if you get tired eating large meals.
- Sit upright when eating and drinking, even when you are in bed, unless your swallowing team has made other positioning suggestions.
- While eating and drinking, avoid distractions such as watching TV and talking.
- Give yourself enough time for meals so that you are not rushed.
- Take small bites and sips. Finish each bite or sip before taking the next.
- Stay as upright as possible for at least 30 minutes after meals and snacks. Do not lie flat.



## If you are on modified food textures and/or thick fluids:

- Eat and drink the foods and fluids suggested by your swallowing team.
- Follow the instructions for thickening fluids provided to you.
- Take your pills one at a time with the food or fluid suggested by your swallowing team.
- Your swallowing team may also suggest you crush your pills. Check with your pharmacist before crushing or breaking any medications.

## Mouth care is important

- Brush your teeth, tongue, gums, and cheeks at least twice a day, even if you wear dentures.
- Regular mouth care helps control the growth of bacteria in your mouth. This lowers your risk of problems like chest infections.

## Contact your doctor or your health care provider if:

- You notice a change in your swallow, such as trouble swallowing or pain when swallowing.
- You have:
  - a congested chest
  - a cough with lots of mucous and phlegm
  - a fever
- You have trouble breathing.
- You think you need a swallowing assessment.