

Eating and Drinking Difficulties in Children Dysphagia

What is Dysphagia?

Dysphagia is the term used to describe eating and drinking difficulties. This may be a difficulty biting, chewing or swallowing food, an over or under sensitivity to food or oro-aversion.



- Increasing or decreasing sensitivity to food.
- Improving oral hygiene.
- Strategies to increase confidence and reduce fear of choking.

Children with eating and drinking difficulties are wherever possible seen in their significant environment.

Who can have Dysphagia?



A vast range of children in Wolverhampton have eating and drinking difficulties. These include children who have a physical and/or learning disability, babies that are born prematurely and children who have food aversions.

- 99% of children with severe cerebral palsy have dysphagia (Calis et al 2008)
- 27% of those with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease have dysphagia (McKinstry et al 2009)

The aims of the speech and language therapist working with a child with dysphagia include:

- Assessing the child
- Ensuring safety (reducing or preventing aspiration) with regards to swallowing function
- Balancing these factors with quality of life
- Working with other members of the multi disciplinary team to optimise nutrition and hydration

What advice does a Speech and Language Therapist Give?

Advice can be provided on the following:

- Modification of the consistency of food and drink to maximize safe swallowing.
- Advice on improving or modifying biting, chewing and swallowing skills.
- Positioning of the child.



"I found the group helpful as it has given us ideas on getting our child to eat different foods through play"
(Parent, August 2011)

"The group was really good – good fun, very nice to know we're not the only one with these challenges and a very welcoming attitude to all children"
(Carer, August 2011)

If untreated, dysphagia can lead to further problems including:

- Impact on general development
- Choking
- Dehydration
- Malnutrition
- Aspiration Pneumonia
- Chronic pain
- Adverse socio- emotional effects
- Food phobias

There is evidence that the appropriate identification and management of dysphagia by speech and language therapists reduces morbidity, mortality and improves the quality of life. (RCSLT 2009)