

Tips for Managing Difficulty Swallowing

Things you can do on your own



- Ask your care team to refer you to a speech pathologist, who can test for a cause and show you techniques to avoid choking
- Avoid gagging or choking by eating soft foods like yogurt, Jello, or liquid meal replacement supplements
- Take small bites, and chew your food well before swallowing
- Use a straw when drinking
- Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day, rather than three larger meals
- Stay hydrated by drinking 6-8 cups of fluid per day, preferably water
- Sit upright when eating or drinking, and stay upright for at least an hour after you eat
- Do not talk while eating
- Eat in a relaxed atmosphere, with no distractions
- Avoid carbonated (bubbly) drinks — they may make you feel bloated
- If food does stick, don't panic – try to relax, drink fluids, and let it pass on its own

See the Other Resources page for more information

With the help of your care team



- If you have an infection causing your mouth to swell, your care team may prescribe you antibiotics
- Your care team may suggest using a tube to help you eat and drink

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When to call your care team for help



- If you are unable to eat or drink without choking or gagging
- If you have pain with swallowing
- If you have a feeling that what you swallow gets “stuck”
- If you have other symptoms that make it difficult to swallow or keep food down, such as nausea, vomiting, mouth sores, or a white coating on your tongue
- If you have signs of dehydration, which include:
 - Feeling weak, dizzy, or lightheaded
 - Having dark yellow or very little urine
 - Having a dry mouth or being thirsty
- If you have weakness, dizziness, lightheadedness, or fast heart beat due to not eating
- If you have not peed for 12 hours or more, or have dark yellow or very little urine and a dry mouth/strong thirst
- If you are losing weight

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