

# Tips to Eat and Swallow Safely

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When swallowing muscles are weak, food and fluids may not move properly from the mouth down to the stomach. Food, fluid, and saliva can get into the airway or lungs and cause choking or chest infection. People with swallowing problems need to be careful when eating. The tips below will help.

## **During meals and snacks remember to:**

- Eat when you are rested and at your best. Eat small meals and snacks often if you become tired eating larger meals.
- Sit or lay as upright as possible when eating and drinking. Your swallowing team may suggest a different position.
- Avoid distractions (such as watching TV) and talking while eating and drinking.
- Give yourself enough time for meals so that you don't rush.
- 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 because of a swallowing problem, remember to:**

- Eat and drink the foods and fluids suggested by your swallowing team.
- Follow the instructions for thickening fluids given by your swallowing team.
- Take your medications one at a time with the food or fluid suggested by your swallowing team. Your swallowing team may also suggest you crush the pills. Check with your pharmacist before crushing or breaking 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 the mouth. This lowers your risk of developing problems like pneumonia.

## **Contact your doctor if:**

- You notice a change in your swallow (for example, cough more, hurts to swallow, have trouble swallowing).
- You have a:
  - fever
  - cough with lots of mucous or phlegm
  - congested chest
  - and/or have trouble breathing
- You think you need a swallowing assessment.