

Swallowing and Parkinson's

Parkinson's Disease and Swallowing Difficulties

- Difficulty swallowing, also called dysphagia, can occur at any stage of Parkinson's Disease.
- Symptoms include difficulty swallowing certain foods or liquids, coughing or throat clearing during or after eating/drinking, excessive drooling, a gurgly voice, and feeling like food is getting stuck in the throat.
- As the disease progresses, swallowing can become severely affected and can lead to foods and/or liquids getting into the lungs which can cause an infection called aspiration pneumonia.

How Does Parkinson's Affect Swallowing

- Weaker jaw and face muscles - Parkinson's can cause these muscles to become less efficient which affects how much control you have while chewing or swallowing. Decreased efficiency and control can make it difficult to swallow.
- Issues with tongue muscles - the tongue is incredibly important in swallowing. It helps control the food and push it to the back of your mouth, which then triggers your swallow reflex.

Swallowing management often involves working with a speech pathologist to:

- identify specific swallowing strategies that can help food or liquid go down safely
- make diet changes such as thickening liquids or making foods softer
- learn and practice swallowing exercises
- if necessary, order a swallow study to visualize how food and liquid move from the mouth down into the throat

Health Care Providers That Can Help

- Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) - experts in swallowing and speech, they can help conduct further swallowing studies and offer great strategies to minimize swallowing difficulties
- Occupational Therapists - can provide recommendations for equipment that may help with eating and drinking. These equipment recommendations will complement the strategies that a speech and language pathologist will implement
- Dietitian - can offer advice on types of foods/drinks that may be easier for you to eat and swallow as well as can provide tips for a healthier diet
- Parkinson's Specialist - can offer suggestions for medications that may be able to help