



Myasthenia Gravis

A rare autoimmune disease, causing muscle weakness

It targets the communication point between the nerve and the muscle called the neuromuscular junction.

Antibodies block, alter, or destroy the neurotransmitter receptors on the muscle tissue and since the muscles can't receive the signal to contract, you end up with weakness.

This weakness in voluntary muscles tends to get worse with activity and improves with rest.

Symptoms can fluctuate and vary in severity. When severe, it can result in difficulty chewing and swallowing. Everyone is different.

The information contained in this brochure was provided by Amanda Cordrick M.A., CCC-SLP



MYASTHENIA GRAVIS AND DYSPHAGIA (Difficulty with Swallowing)

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What are the best foods to eat to prevent choking and what should I avoid when I'm weak? Everyone is different. Here are some tips that may help:

TO REDUCE RESIDUE IN THE THROAT:

1. Moisten solid food with gravy, sauce, butter, broth, etc.
2. Choose chicken or fish. Avoid tougher meats.
3. Avoid dry crumbly food such as crackers, rice, cookies, nuts, popcorn.
4. Avoid bread products – bread, muffins, bagels (or moisten them).

TO REDUCE FATIGUE WHILE EATING:

1. Eat several small meals during the day.
2. Chop or mince solid foods.
3. Eat your largest meal earlier in the day when you have more energy.

TO REDUCE THE RISK OF ASPIRATION:

1. Take small bites (1/2 a teaspoon).
2. Sit upright – 90 degrees when eating.
3. Thicken fluids to the consistency recommended by your doctor or SLP.
4. Remember that things like ice cream, and popsicles melt which turn them into a thin liquid. Same with fruit and their juice.
5. Be careful with mixed consistency foods – cereal with milk, soups, etc.

Safe swallow strategies:

1. Sit up (90 degrees) when eating and for 30 minutes after eating.
2. Alternate food and liquids/alternate consistencies.
3. Take small bites and/or sips.
4. You can give liquids via spoon sips – to help control the amount.
5. If you start to cough, wait until you STOP coughing before taking another bite or sip
6. Make sure each bite is swallowed/check the mouth for residue (tongue sweep).

POSITIONING TO HELP SWALLOWING:

1. Chin down posture – chin is tucked down toward the neck during the swallow.
2. Chin up posture – the chin is tilted up, which may help move the food to the back of the throat to initiate the swallow.
3. Head rotation (turn to the side) – the head is turned either to the left or the right, typically to the weaker side (although the opposite may be true) to direct the food to the stronger side of the throat.
4. Head tilt – the head is tilted toward the stronger side to keep the food on the chewing surface.

IF FOOD SEEMS TO BE “STUCK” IN THE ESOPHAGUS:

1. Try to cough or clear your throat.
2. Effortful swallow - swallow as hard as you can while pushing the tongue up against the roof of your mouth (like you're trying to swallow a golf ball).
3. Double swallow/repeat swallows.
4. Wash it down with liquids/other consistency.

How can I help myself if I am alone and choking?

According to the American Red Cross:

1. Call 911 using a landline or GPS enabled phone– even if you are not able to speak, the open line will cause the dispatcher to send help.

2. Try to cough up the object – if you can cough or make any sound, your airway is not completely blocked. Try clearing the object with forceful coughing/throat clearing. **DO NOT TRY TO DRINK ANYTHING.**

3. Deliver abdominal thrusts – using your hands, just as if you were giving abdominal thrusts to another person. You could also bend over and press your abdomen against a firm object, such as the back of a chair or railing. **Do NOT bend over anything with a sharp edge or corner that could hurt you and be careful with railings that are elevated.**

SWALLOWING EXERCISES:

NOTE: These are just a few of the exercises available and the ones I used and my supervisor recommended while working in a skilled nursing facility. The first two are the ones I used the most.

1. Masako – hold tongue between your teeth/gums, and swallow while keeping your tongue in place.
2. Effortful Swallow – Swallow your saliva while you squeeze your mouth and neck muscles very hard.
3. Hawk – say the word “Hawk” with a forceful, deep K sound at the end of the word.