



# Swallowing problems while in hospital

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Next review: March 2027  
Version 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Speech and Language Therapist: \_\_\_\_\_

## > About this leaflet

This leaflet contains information about swallowing difficulties. The medical name for difficulty with swallowing is dysphagia.

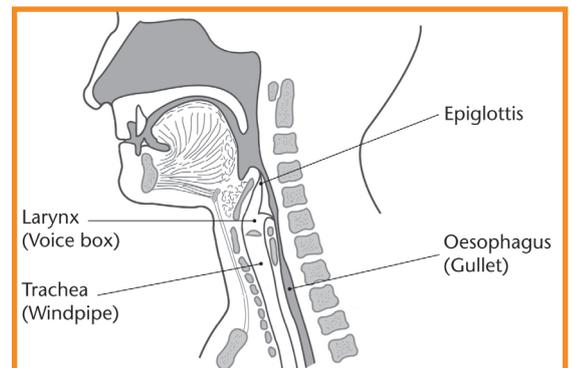
Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) can help you with your swallowing difficulty as they have knowledge and understanding of the anatomy involved. SLTs assess the safety and efficiency of the swallow and give advice on how to manage a swallowing difficulty.

SLTs can suggest ways to modify what you eat and drink. We describe modified food and drink options on the following pages.

After completing a swallow assessment an SLT will place a yellow “Safer Swallowing Recommendations” sign near your bedside with details of your food and drink recommendations.

## > Drink descriptors

SLT may recommend that you change the consistency of your drinks. Thicker drinks travel more slowly and may be easier to swallow depending on the nature of the swallowing difficulty identified. Drinks are thickened using a “thickening agent”. A tin of thickening powder will be provided by the ward if it is needed. The manufacturer’s guidelines (usually on the side of the tin) detail how much thickener needs to be added to your drink to achieve the consistencies below.



Drinks level and descriptor	Description
<b>Level 0</b> (normal, thin)	Normal, thin fluids.
<b>Level 1</b> (slightly thick)	Leaves a coating on an empty glass and can be easily taken through a straw (if recommended).
<b>Level 2</b> (mildly thick)	Leaves a thin coat on the back of a spoon, can be drunk from a cup and easily taken through a straw (if recommended).
<b>Level 3</b> (moderately thick)	Leaves a thick coat on the back of a spoon, can be drunk from a cup, but too thick to be taken through a straw.
<b>Level 4</b> (extremely thick)	Unable to be drunk through a straw or a cup due to thickness. Needs to be taken from a spoon.

## Food descriptors

There are daily set menus for diet levels 3, 4, 5, and 6. Level 7 – Easy to chew is available on the standard menu. Catering assistants will go through the options available to you each day. Please note Level 3 options in hospital are soup only. The medical team will look at ways to maintain adequate nutrition if you are unable to move quickly from level 3 during your hospital stay.

Drinks level and descriptor	Description
<b>Level 3</b> (Liquidised)	Food has been pureed or has a pureed texture. It does not require chewing. It does not hold its shape on a plate and cannot be eaten with a fork. It is smooth and does not have any bits.
<b>Level 4</b> (Pureed)	Food has been pureed or has a pureed texture. It does not require chewing. It does hold its shape on a plate and can be eaten with a fork. It is smooth and does not have any bits.
<b>Level 5</b> (Minced and moist)	Food has been mashed or blended before serving, with bits no bigger than 4mm. It requires very little chewing. It is usually served with a thick, smooth sauce.
<b>Level 6</b> (Soft and bite-sized)	Food is soft, tender and moist. It requires some chewing. Served in bite size pieces – no bigger than 15mm x 15mm. Food can be mashed with a fork. It is usually served with a sauce.
<b>Level 7 – subcategory</b> (Easy to chew)	Normal, everyday foods of soft and tender texture. Food piece size is not restricted. Food should break apart easily with the side of a fork and can be squashed with pressure from a fork.
<b>Level 7</b> (Regular diet)	Full range of normal diet with no restrictions.

## ➤ Yellow “safer swallowing recommendations” sign

Following your speech and language therapy assessment an SLT will place a yellow sign either above your bed or on your door so that staff and visitors will know your safest swallow recommendations.

The sign will look like this:

It is important that family and visitors are aware of your SLT recommendations and speak with ward staff before offering you any food and drink.

During your stay in hospital, your food and drink recommendations may change. An SLT will update these changes on the yellow sign and discuss these with you to help you make informed choices about managing your swallowing difficulty.

Leaflets for each diet level are available. They have full descriptions of each diet level, give examples of foods and meals and explain ways to check food is prepared to the level recommended. These leaflets may be given when you have stabilised at a particular diet level or on discharge from hospital.

Safer Swallowing Recommendations	
Ward Use	
Name:	CHI:
Date:	Ward:
<b>VISITORS:</b> Please consult Ward Staff before giving any food or drink.	
<b>Food</b>	<b>Fluids</b>
Level 7 (Regular Diet) <input type="checkbox"/>	Level 0 (Normal/Thin) <input type="checkbox"/>
Level 7 (Easy to chew) <input type="checkbox"/>	Level 1 (Slightly Thick) Nutilis Clear 1 scoop per 200mls <input type="checkbox"/>
Level 6 (Soft and bite-sized) <input type="checkbox"/>	Level 2 (Mildly Thick) Nutilis Clear 2 scoops per 200mls <input type="checkbox"/>
Level 5 (Minced and moist) <input type="checkbox"/>	Level 3 (Moderately Thick) Nutilis Clear 3 scoops per 200mls <input type="checkbox"/>
Level 4 (Pureed) <input type="checkbox"/>	Level 4 (Extremely Thick) Nutilis Clear 7 scoops per 200mls <input type="checkbox"/>
Level 3 (Liquidised) <input type="checkbox"/>	No Oral Fluids <input type="checkbox"/>
No Oral Food <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sit upright at a 90 degree angle (as much as possible)</li><li>• Patient should be awake and alert</li><li>• Keep sat upright for 30 minutes after oral intake</li><li>• Maintain good oral hygiene</li></ul>	<b>Additional strategies</b>
Ward Staff (Name): _____	Designation: _____
Signature: _____	

## ➤ High risk foods

When you have a difficulty chewing or swallowing some foods present a high risk of choking. Listed below are examples of the kinds of foods that have the highest risk and should be avoided.

- Stringy fibrous textures e.g. pineapple, runner beans, celery, lettuce, stringy melted cheese.
- Vegetable and fruit skins and pith e.g. grapes, baked beans, soya beans, peppers, orange and mandarin segments, potato skins.
- Mixed consistencies e.g. cereals which do not blend with milk (e.g. muesli), mince and thin gravy.
- Crunchy foods e.g. toast, dry biscuits, crisps.
- Crumbly foods e.g. bread crusts, pie crusts, dry biscuits.
- Hard foods e.g. boiled and chewy sweets and toffees, nuts and seeds.

## ➤ Difficulty with tablets

Consult medical staff or a pharmacist about taking medication in syrup or soluble form. Do not crush tablets or open up capsules without checking that it is safe to do this.



## > Swallowing strategies

Here is some general advice which you may find useful to help with your swallow:

- Sit in an upright position.
- Take time to eat and drink.
- Take small mouthfuls.
- Chew food well and make sure that your mouth is empty before taking another mouthful.
- Try to eat in a quiet environment and minimise background distractions e.g. turning off the TV.
- Take regular sips of fluid when eating to help clear any food left in your mouth or throat.

Your SLT may suggest other ways of helping that are more specific to you.

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## > Further information

Please contact the Speech and Language Therapy department if:

- You or your relatives have any worries or questions about your swallowing problem.
- Your swallow changes.

Your Speech and Language Therapy department phone number is **0141 951 5121**.

### All of our publications are available in different languages, larger print, braille (English only), audio tape or another format of your choice.

我們所有的印刷品均有不同語言版本、大字體版本、盲文（僅有英文）、錄音帶版本或你想要的另外形式供選擇。

كافة مطبوعاتنا متاحة بلغات مختلفة و بالأحرف الطباعية الكبيرة و بطريقة بريل الخاصة بالمكفوفين (باللغة الإنكليزية فقط) و على شريط كاسيت سمعي أو بصيغة بديلة حسب خيارك.

Tha gach sgrìobhainn againn rim faotainn ann an diofar chànanan, clò nas motha, Braille (Beurla a-mhàin), teip claisinn no riochd eile a tha sibh airson a thaghadh.

हमारे सब प्रकाशन अनेक भाषाओं, बड़े अक्षरों की छपाई, ब्रेल (केवल अंग्रेज़ी), सुनने वाली कसेट या आपकी पसंदनुसार किसी अन्य फॉरमेट (आरएफ) में भी उपलब्ध हैं।

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ہماری تمام مطبوعات مختلف زبانوں، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی، بریل (صرف انگریزی)، سنے والی کست یا آپ کی پسند کے مطابق کسی دیگر صورت (فارمیٹ) میں بھی دستیاب ہیں۔

This leaflet was originally devised by SLT and reproduced for the Golden Jubilee National Hospital with kind permission from Greater Glasgow and Clyde.



: **0141 951 5513**