



**SPEECH
PATHOLOGY**



Swallowing Awareness Day

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Dysphagia: A Difficult Diagnosis to Swallow

Wednesday 18th of March is Swallowing Awareness Day and this year's theme is Dysphagia: A Difficult Diagnosis to Swallow.

Did you know?

We swallow approximately 700 times each day.

We swallow once per minute when awake- more when eating!

It takes 26 muscles to swallow.

Over 1 million Australians have trouble swallowing.



What is Dysphagia?

Dysphagia is a breakdown in the swallow process. Swallowing refers to the way we suck, chew, bite, prepare and swallow our foods and fluids.

Dysphagia can occur at any point in the lifespan and presents differently depending on where the breakdown is in the swallow process.



What causes Dysphagia?

Some individuals may have dysphagia throughout their life due to developmental disabilities whereas others may acquire dysphagia.

The following are conditions that can cause dysphagia in infants, toddlers and children:

- GORD/reflux
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Respiratory difficulties
- Cardiac disease
- Structural abnormalities e.g. cleft lip
- Tongue tie
- Neurological conditions
- Allergies or intolerances
- Tracheostomy
- Prematurity
- Brain injury

Signs of Dysphagia

- Coughing during or after oral intake
- Choking
- Gagging or vomiting
- Back arching
- Crying during mealtimes
- Refusal of food and spitting out food
- Voice and breathing changes during oral intake
- Frequent congestion, particularly after meals
- Frequent respiratory infections
- Poor saliva control
- Difficulty sucking during breast or bottle feeding
- Avoiding specific foods or textures
- Unplanned weight loss or difficulty gaining weight



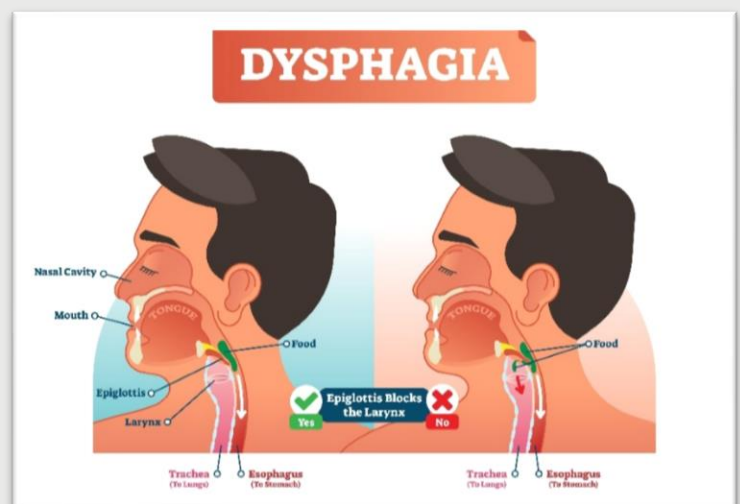
Prevalence of Dysphagia

25–45% of a typically developing children will have dysphagia at some point in their childhood

31–99% of children with cerebral palsy

70–89% of children with developmental disabilities will have a feeding disorder

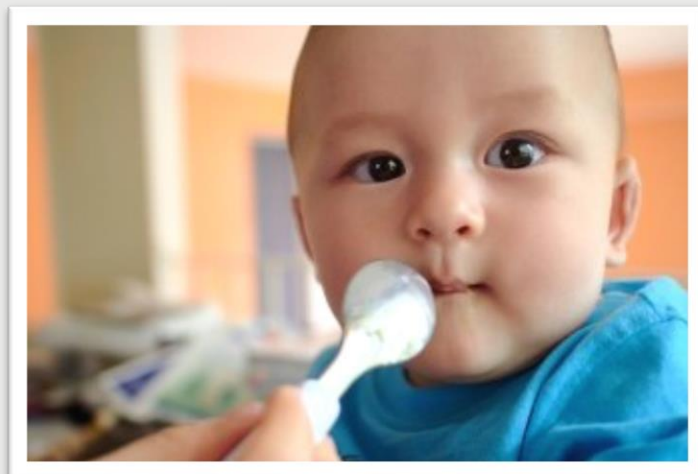
26–40% of infants born prematurely will have dysphagia



Impacts of Dysphagia

Dysphagia can lead to:

- Pain and discomfort
- Malnutrition
- Dehydration
- Poor growth & development
- Weight loss
- Chest infections/pneumonia
- Choking
- Death



How can a Speech Pathologist help?

The muscles of the throat and mouth that are used for speech are the same as the ones for swallowing.

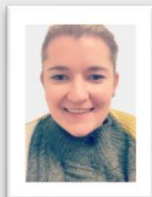
Speech Pathologists can complete an assessment of swallowing difficulties, provide a diagnosis and support management of the condition. Assessments can be completed during mealtimes to gather comprehensive information on the individual's swallow function.

Additional support a Speech Pathologist may provide:

- Identify possible causes of eating and drinking difficulties
- Recommend feeding equipment and feeding positions
- Recommend modified foods or thickened fluids
- Recommend mealtime adjustments to better suit the child
- Refer to other professionals and services

If you think you or someone you care for may have Dysphagia:

- Consult with your GP
- Discuss concerns with your Maternal and Child Health Nurse
- Get a referral to a Speech Pathologist
- You may also require a referral to a specialist such as an Ears, Nose & Throat Specialist



Need assistance supporting someone with Dysphagia?

To consult with OSCAR Care Group's Speech Pathologist, Delaney Sadler, please call or email via our contact details below.

