



For Caregivers: Safe Swallowing Tips

This handout is for people helping someone with swallowing problems. It provides important tips to make eating and drinking safer and lower the risk of choking, inhaling food or liquid by accident (aspiration), or other swallowing problems. Be sure to follow these steps as directed by the patient's speech-language pathologist (SLP).

A separate handout for patients is included below.

Before Eating or Drinking

Be sure the patient:

- ☐ Sits up straight in a chair, couch, or bed.
- ☐ Eats in a quiet space with no distractions.
- ☐ Takes their time and doesn't rush.
- ☐ Follows any special food or drink instructions (like eating soft foods or thickened liquids).
- ☐ Does any mouth or swallowing exercises recommended by their SLP before starting.

During Eating or Drinking

Be sure the patient:

- ☐ Takes small bites and sips. If needed, use special cups or utensils to help.
- ☐ Chews food completely before swallowing.
- ☐ Swallows fully before taking another bite or sip.
- ☐ Avoids talking while chewing or swallowing.
- ☐ Switches between solid food and liquids if recommended.
- ☐ Stays away from foods that are dry, sticky, hard, or have tough skins (like raw apples). Add sauce or gravy to dry food to make it easier to swallow.
- ☐ Only uses straws or special feeding tools if the SLP says it's okay.
- ☐ Pauses between bites or sips to make sure they're comfortable before continuing.

After Eating or Drinking

Be sure the patient:

- ☐ Stays sitting up for at least 30 minutes to help with digestion and prevent aspiration.
- ☐ Checks their mouth for leftover food and clears it as needed.



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Additional Tips

Encourage the patient to:

- Drink enough fluids as recommended.
- Avoid foods with mixed textures (like soup with chunks) unless approved by their SLP.
- Take breaks if they feel tired while eating.

Special Instructions from Your SLP

When to Seek Help

Call the SLP or doctor if the patient:

- Coughs or clears their throat often while eating.
- Has a wet or gurgly voice after swallowing.
- Has trouble chewing or moving food in their mouth.
- Feels pain while swallowing.
- Loses weight unexpectedly or seems dehydrated.

Remember: Safe swallowing starts with paying attention and following the SLP's advice. If you have any concerns, don't hesitate to ask for help. **Keep emergency contact information nearby, especially if swallowing problems are severe.**



For Patients: Safe Swallowing Tips

Eating and drinking safely can help prevent choking or other problems.
Follow these simple steps:

Before You Eat or Drink

- ☐ Sit up straight.
- ☐ Be calm and avoid distractions.
- ☐ Take your time. Eat slowly.
- ☐ Follow your special food or drink plan (for example, thick liquids, soft foods).
- ☐ Do any mouth or swallowing exercises your speech therapist taught you.

After Eating or Drinking

- ☐ Stay sitting up for 30 minutes.
- ☐ Check your mouth for leftover food and clear it if needed.
- ☐ Tell your speech therapist if you cough, choke, or have trouble breathing.

Extra Tips

- ☐ Drink enough fluids as advised.
- ☐ If tired, take breaks and eat later.
- ☐ Keep emergency contact information nearby.

When to Call for Help

Call your speech therapist if you:

- Cough or choke often while eating.
- Feel like food is stuck in your throat.
- Have pain when swallowing.
- Lose weight without trying.

**For more help,
ask your speech therapist.**
Safe swallowing is important
for your health!