



Swallowing Problems in Parkinson's Disease

Swallowing Changes in Parkinson's

People may have difficulty swallowing as Parkinson's disease progresses. As Parkinson's affects the muscles involved in chewing and swallowing, you may find that it is more difficult to eat, drink and control saliva.

Signs that you may be having difficulty swallowing include:

- Drooling
- Coughing during meals
- Clearing your throat frequently
- Feeling that food or pills are getting stuck
- Developing a wet/gurgley voice during a meal

Suggestions for Coping with a Swallowing Problem

If you are having swallowing problems, you should consult a Speech-Language Pathologist. A Speech-Language Pathologist will evaluate your swallowing, give you information and advice about safe swallowing practices and appropriate food and liquid textures, and may suggest a program of exercises and strategies to improve swallowing.

The following general suggestions may also help improve your eating, chewing and swallowing:

- Sit upright (preferably in a chair) when eating, drinking and taking pills.
- Sit upright for at least 30 minutes after eating.
- Take small amounts of food and chew it well. Swallow each mouthful completely before eating more.
- Take small sips when drinking. Take one sip at a time.

- Be cautious when drinking from a straw. If you do use a straw, avoid taking too much liquid, too far back in the mouth, and drinking too quickly.
- Hold your head forward, keeping your chin slightly down or parallel to the table when swallowing. Avoid tipping your head backward when you swallow.
- Don't talk with food in your mouth.
- Minimize distractions during meals.
- Consider eating several small meals during the day to reduce fatigue.
- Be aware of food sticking in your mouth. Use your tongue to help clear food that may be left on the sides of your mouth.
- Choose soft, moist foods if you have difficulty chewing or clearing food from your mouth. Avoid dry, crumbly foods that fall apart easily. Use caution when eating foods that have both a liquid and solid component (ex. Fruit cocktail) and consider draining off the liquid.
- Take pills with a puree like applesauce or yogurt. Take one pill at a time.
- Make sure that your dentures fit well. Use adhesive if necessary or speak to your dentist.
- Brush your teeth and keep your mouth as clean as possible.
- Consider having a member of your household or caregiver learn the Heimlich maneuver if you are at risk of choking.

Source: Swallowing Issues (Parkinson Canada); www.parkinson.ca

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