

Eating and drinking with acknowledged risks

Unsafe swallow

Swallowing problems (dysphagia) may result from dementia, stroke, various neurological diseases (Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease etc.), learning disability and a range of other acute and chronic health conditions.

If you or your relative is experiencing swallowing difficulties, there may be a high risk of food, fluid and saliva 'going down the wrong way'. This is when it enters the wind pipe or the lungs. This is known as aspiration. Aspiration can be uncomfortable as it can cause coughing and/or choking. However sometimes it happens with no immediate signs or symptoms (silent aspiration). Aspiration can be dangerous as it can lead to pneumonia (an infection in the lungs).

Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) specialise in the assessment and treatment of dysphagia and in many cases are able to find ways to reduce the risks for people with swallowing difficulties.

However, for some patients, even with support, their swallow is just not safe.

Alternative nutrition and hydration

There are many people, who despite having an unsafe swallow, are unsuitable candidates for alternative nutrition and hydration (such as tube feeding) for the following reasons:

- The risks of alternative nutrition and hydration outweigh the benefits
- Alternative nutrition and hydration is refused by a consenting patient
- Alternative nutrition and hydration would not maintain or improve quality of life

It is when patients have an unsafe swallow on all food and drink and are not suitable for alternative nutrition and hydration that eating and drinking with acknowledged risks should be considered.

Patient Choice

A person may not wish to follow recommendations provided by a trained professional. They have a right to do so if they are able to make an informed decision.

Eating and drinking with acknowledged risks

When a person continues to eat and drink accepting a risk of aspiration and/or choking this is referred to as eating and drinking with acknowledged risks. Eating and Drinking with acknowledged risks may be put in place for one or more of the following reasons:

- Advanced stages of illness
- The person's swallow is unlikely to improve
- When patient choice takes priority over swallow safety
- Alternative nutrition and hydration options are declined or inappropriate

A shared decision making in dysphagia decision should result in a plan which balances safety and quality of life as equally as possible, taking fully into account the personal, cultural and religious beliefs of the individual and are tailored to the needs of the individual.

Sources of information

Speech and Language Therapy contact numbers:

Hospitals:

Eastbourne DGH – 0300 131 4670

Conquest – 0300 131 5016

Bexhill Irvine Unit – 0300 131 4430

Community Teams:

Eastbourne Seaford & Hailsham - 0300 131 4541

Hastings & Rother – 0300 131 4419

Eastbourne Community Stroke: 0300 131 4580

Bexhill Community Stroke: 0300 131 4415

Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Laura Jones Acute Lead Speech and Language Therapist

The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet:

Community Health and Integrated Care

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Responsible clinician/author: Laura Jones Acute Lead Speech and Language Therapist