GUIDE TO SAFER SWALLOWING

From the makers of the Thick-It® brand of products

Mealtime can be stressful for both people with swallowing difficulties (dysphagia) and their caregivers. People with dysphagia are at a much greater risk of aspiration—breathing in foreign material like food, drinks, or saliva[1]—which can lead to aspiration pneumonia, a serious and sometimes fatal condition. Follow this guide to ensure a safe and pleasant meal experience for all.

Did you know?

1/2 of people with dysphagia will experience aspiration[2]

1/3 of those will need treatment for aspiration pneumonia at some point[2]

It takes **50** pairs of muscles to move food from the mouth to the stomach[3]

A Word from the Experts

"Swallowing safely for someone with dysphagia requires diligence and focus... A speech language pathologist specializing in swallowing disorders can assist those with dysphagia in establishing a safe swallow routine."

—**Ed Steger,** ***President,*** National Foundation of Swallowing Disorders

Before the Meal

Rest for 30 minutes

Let the patient **rest** for 30 minutes before dining to ensure they are refreshed and alert.[4]

Create a **quiet**, well-lit atmosphere. Limit noisy, rambunctious visitors, loud TV or music.

Provide sturdy chair or elevate

Provide a sturdy chair. If the patient is confined to bed, **elevate** the backrest to a 90° angle.

Prepare the meal

Prepare the meal according to the healthcare provider's recommendations for food and beverage texture and viscosity.

Maintain good oral hygiene

Make sure the patient's teeth are clean and, if required, dentures are well-fitted. Help patients maintain good oral **hygiene** throughout the day.

Dining with Dignity

Sit upright

Make sure the patient is **sitting upright** with feet comfortably on the floor.[4]

To prevent the food getting cold, begin by **serving half** the meal, then offer a second helping.

If the patient needs assistance, **sit at their level**. Don't stand over them.

Normalize mealtime

To help normalize mealtime, remain calm and friendly. Encourage the patient to **relax**. Mealtime should be a pleasant experience and an opportunity for the patient to connect with others.

Eat Slowly

Alternate between small bites and sips, encouraging the patient to **eat slowly.**[4]

Vary placement of each bite

Vary the placement of food in the patient's mouth depending on the type of swallowing difficulty they have.[3]

Make sure the **mouth is clear** before offering the next bite or sip.

After the Meal

Record fluids consumed

Monitor and **record** the amount of fluids consumed.[4]

Sit upright

To prevent reflux, have the patient **sit upright** for 30 minutes after dining.

Variety can help

Offer a **variety** of beverages throughout the day to ensure that the patient stays well hydrated.[4]

Find more useful resources and learn more about the Thick-It® brand's suite of foods, beverages, and thickeners specifically developed for people with dysphagia.

Visit thickit.com

1. Medline Plus, U.S. National Library of Medicine
2. Cedars Sinai, "Aspiration from Dysphagia"
3. National Institute of Health Publication No. 13-4307: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. "Dysphagia"
4. Norma A. Metheny, PhD, RN, FAAN, Saint Louis University School of Nursing. "Preventing Aspiration in Older Adults with Dysphagia," Issue 20, General Assessment Try This:® Series on www.ConsultGeri.org, a clinical website of the Hartford Institute of Geriatric Nursing

Thick-It® is a registered trademark of Kent Precision Foods Group, Inc. © 2020 Kent Precision Foods Group, Inc.