

# PARKINSON'S & DYSPHAGIA: Symptoms & Strategies

Parkinson's disease, or PD, is a progressive disorder of the nervous system, affecting movement, causing tremors and stiffness. In recognition of Parkinson's Awareness Month in April, the makers of Thick-It® dysphagia nutrition products present these facts and tips for patients, healthcare professionals, and caregivers.



**60,000** Americans are diagnosed with PD every year.<sup>1</sup>



More than 80% of patients with PD will develop swallowing difficulties over the course of their illness.<sup>2</sup>



## Know the Risks



up to 90% of PD patients experience swallowing and speech impairment.<sup>3</sup>



In the early stages of PD, swallowing problems (dysphagia) often go undetected by caregivers and patients. Patients may not even be aware when they've aspirated.<sup>4</sup>



Dysphagia can lead to malnutrition, dehydration, and aspiration of food or liquid into the lungs, causing aspiration pneumonia—the leading cause of death in people with PD.<sup>5</sup>



## Watch for the Symptoms

Are you, your loved one, or patient experiencing any of these symptoms?<sup>5</sup> If so, ask your doctor for a referral to a speech-language pathologist (SLP) who specializes in swallowing disorders.

- Losing weight without trying
- Avoiding drinking liquids
- Feeling like there's food stuck in the throat
- Drooling
- Food collecting around the gum line
- Coughing or choking before, during, or after eating and drinking
- Heartburn or a sore throat
- Difficulty keeping food or liquid in the mouth

## Strategies & Solutions:



Once diagnosed with PD, patients and caregivers should closely monitor the patient for signs of swallowing issues, such as increased coughing, weight loss, or altered voice quality.<sup>4</sup>



During meals, sit upright at a 90-degree angle with the head tilted slightly forward. Remain upright for at least 15 minutes after eating.<sup>6</sup>



Reduce distractions. Eat one bite at a time, and chew slowly and thoroughly.<sup>6</sup>



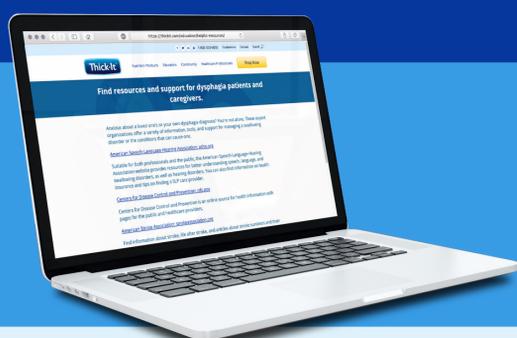
To reduce the risk of aspiration, an SLP can recommend a modified diet incorporating thickened beverages and puréed foods, such as those in the Thick-It® brand's suite of dysphagia solutions.<sup>6</sup>



Practice the effortful or hard swallow—gather saliva to the middle of your tongue. Keep lips pressed together. Swallow the saliva all at once, as if you are swallowing a grape or pill.<sup>7</sup>



A music therapy-based singing intervention has been shown to significantly improve swallow, voice, and respiratory control while enhancing quality of life for people with PD.<sup>3</sup>



For many patients with PD, a dysphagia diagnosis exacerbates an already stressful and frightening situation. The Thick-It® brand offers a variety of resources to help manage swallowing disorders. Visit [our resources](#) page for tips, tools, and support for patients and caregivers.

1. Statistics, Parkinson's Foundation website

<https://www.parkinson.org/Understanding-Parkinsons/Statistics>

2. Inga Suttrup, Tobias Warnecke. Dysphagia in Parkinson's Disease, 2016 Feb;31(1):24-32. doi: 10.1007/s00455-015-9671-9. Epub 2015 Nov 21. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26590572/>

3. Parkinson's Disease Patients' Singing Improves Voice and Swallow Impairment Elizabeth Stegemöller, PhD, MT-BC. Today's Geriatric Medicine. January/February 2018. Vol. 11 No. 1 P. 18. <https://www.todaysgeriaticmedicine.com/archive/JF18p18.shtml>

4. Simons, Janine A. Swallowing Dysfunctions in Parkinson's Disease. Int Rev Neurobiol. 2017;134:1207-1238. doi: 10.1016/bs.irn.2017.05.026. Epub 2017 Jul 15. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28805570/>

5. Speech & Swallowing Problems. Parkinson's Foundation website.

<https://www.parkinson.org/Understanding-Parkinsons/Symptoms/Non-Movement-Symptoms/Speech-and-Swallowing-Problems>

6. Neill, Amy, Dietician. "Parkinson's & Difficulty Swallowing." Parkinsondiet.com blog. 12/2019. <https://parkinsondiet.com/parkinsons-difficulty-swallowing/>

7. Best Exercises for Dysphagia. WebMD A to Z Guides. WebMD Medical Reference. Reviewed by Dan Brennan, MD on November 17, 2020. <https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/best-exercises-dysphagia#1>

Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have about the use of Thick-It® products. The information contained herein is general and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment in any manner.