

A graphic illustration of a fork and a plate. The fork is a light blue silhouette with three tines, positioned vertically. To its right is a large, light blue circle representing a plate, with a dark blue rectangular shape on its right side and a dark blue circle at the bottom right, suggesting a hole or a shadow. The text 'Problems swallowing?' is overlaid in white on the fork and plate.

Problems swallowing?

Resources for **clients and carers**
July 2007

Ensuring safer practice for adults with learning disabilities who have dysphagia

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) promotes safer healthcare by collecting and analysing information about patient safety incidents from staff and patients, and through working with healthcare organisations to introduce solutions to reduce the risk of harm.

If you would like more information about the NPSA's work, visit our website at: **www.npsa.nhs.uk**



Swallowing problems

This information is for adults with learning disabilities and their carers

If you find it difficult to eat, drink or swallow, you may have a problem called 'dysphagia'.



You may have swallowing problems if you:

- find it hard to eat or drink;
- keep coughing or clearing your throat;
- breathe noisily;
- swallow a lot when eating or drinking;
- choke on your food or drink.



Other signs that may mean you have swallowing problems include:

- frequent chest infections;
- weight loss;
- constipation;
- bringing back food or being sick.



Swallowing problems can happen for lots of different reasons. The problem might be caused by difficulties with the messages getting from your brain to your mouth or throat. Sometimes it is because you have other medical problems or because of the medication you are taking.



Having a swallowing problem can be serious. You may get very thin and it may hurt to eat and drink. Your food or drink may go down the wrong way and make you ill, or you may choke on food.



If you think you are having difficulties with swallowing you should speak to your family or one of your care staff. A speech and language therapist (or a specialist clinician) will come and find out why you are having problems. She/he will help you to eat and drink safely. She/he will talk to your family or care staff so they know how to keep you safe.



Things to help

The NPSA has gathered together materials that may help adults with learning disabilities who have dysphagia and their carers.

These are:

- Eating, drinking and swallowing care plan;
- Mealtime information sheets;
- Consent form for assessment of eating and drinking or swallowing problems.

Eating, drinking and swallowing care plan

This care plan will be filled in by a speech and language therapist or specialist clinician. The plan will say how the client likes to sit, what they can eat and drink, and the equipment (knife, fork, cup, etc) they need to help them.

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Eating, drinking and swallowing care plan

Date: _____

Client's name: _____ Date of birth: _____

Description of eating, drinking or swallowing difficulties

Aims of intervention and care plan

Actions needed:

Environment

Positioning

Equipment

Food texture

Drinks

Assistance required

Communication

Likes and dislikes

Things to look out for

I have explained the above to [insert name] and key support staff.

Signed: _____ Speech and Language Therapist Date: _____

I have read and understood this eating and drinking care plan and will ensure all staff follow its recommendations.

Signed: _____ Manager/Key worker Date: _____

This document is available for download in MSWord format and for adaptation for local use from www.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/dysphagia



Mealtime information sheets

The interim mealtime information sheet outlines the recommendations for individual client requirements at mealtimes, and should be completed by speech and language therapists or specialist clinicians. A version of the mealtime information form with client contact details and photograph is also available, allowing staff and carers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with each client's appearance, needs and requirements. This may also be laminated for use as a placemat. The NPSA has also produced a completed mealtime information form, based on the needs of a typical adult with learning disabilities who has dysphagia.

This document is available for download in MSWord format and for adaptation for local use from www.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/dysphagia

Consent form for assessment of eating and drinking or swallowing problems

This is a user-friendly document to work through with the client with learning disabilities who has dysphagia to enable them to give consent for an assessment and care plan. It provides a record of consent.

CONSENT FORM FOR ASSESSMENT OF EATING, DRINKING OR SWALLOWING PROBLEMS

Client's name _____

Sometimes it is hard to eat and drink.

Eating some things can make you cough or choke.

Food or drink may go down the wrong way and harm you.

Some people eat very slowly because it is difficult to chew or swallow.

Some people eat too fast.

This document is available for download in MSWord format and for adaptation for local use from www.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/dysphagia

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Information sheets for care staff were devised by Alex Kelly, Lead Speech and Language Therapist, Hampshire Partnership Trust.

The general practitioner's dysphagia protocol for people with learning disabilities was devised by Dr Derek Conaty and Dr Peter Baddeley.

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- Valuing People Support Team
- Ayrshire and Arran PCT Learning Disability Services
- 5 Boroughs Partnership NHS Trust
- Coventry Primary Care Trust
- Gloucestershire NHS Partnership Trust
- Hampshire Partnership Trust
- Manchester Learning Disability Partnership
- South Tyneside Primary Care Trust
- Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Trust
- Wirral and West Cheshire Learning Disability Services

