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Eating and drinking with acknowledged risks (EDAR) when you have difficulty swallowing

Speech and Language Therapy

Information for Patients

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Introduction

You have difficulty swallowing. This is called dysphagia. This can cause food, drinks or saliva to sometimes go down the wrong way into the airway or lungs. When this happens, it is called aspiration.

Aspiration can increase the risk of:

- choking
- chest infections
- weight loss from not eating enough (malnutrition)
- dehydration

Sometimes aspiration causes:

- coughing
- discomfort
- breathing difficulties
- pain

At other times, it may happen without any obvious signs. This is called silent aspiration.

Support for swallowing difficulties

Your speech and language therapist can check your swallowing and give you advice.

Sometimes, changing what you eat and drink or how you eat and drink, can help stop food and drink going the wrong way. Sometimes this is not possible.

If it is not safe for you to swallow, we may suggest you stop eating and drinking and use a feeding tube instead. This is called nil by mouth (NBM).

Eating and drinking with acknowledged risk (EDAR) means continuing to eat and drink even though there is a risk that food or drink may enter your airway or lungs.

When do we choose EDAR?

We may choose EDAR if:

- The risk of food and drink going into your airway (aspiration) cannot be completely prevented.
- Eating and drinking is important to you for comfort, enjoyment and quality of life.
- A feeding tube is not suitable for you or you do not want one. A feeding tube can go through the nose into the stomach or directly into the stomach.
- You have a feeding tube, but you would still like to have small amounts of food or drink because you enjoy eating and drinking.

Your healthcare team will talk with you and, if appropriate, your family, friends or carers. Together, you will talk about the benefits and risks of each option and decide what is best for you.

If you cannot make this decision yourself, the healthcare team will decide what is best for you. They will look at your wishes, values and what is believed to be best for your care and wellbeing.

Making eating and drinking as safe as possible

There are ways that can help make your eating and drinking safer.

Reducing the risk of chest infections and choking

To lower the risk of getting a chest infection or choking, you can:

- Keep your mouth and teeth clean. This helps reduce the number of germs that could enter your lungs.
- Sit as upright as possible when eating and drinking.
- Feed yourself if you can. If you need help, someone may use hand over hand support. This is where they gently guide your hand while you eat or drink.
- Take small bites and small sips.
- Eat and drink slowly.
- Only eat and drink when you are fully awake and alert.
- Stay active and mobile if possible, especially after meals. Try not to lie down straight after eating or drinking. This can help your body clear any food and drink that has gone into the airway.

Reducing the risk of poor nutrition and dehydration

To lower the risk of losing weight or becoming dehydrated, you can:

- Eat and drink small amounts more often throughout the day.
- Follow any advice from your dietitian about food, drinks or supplements.

Advice from your speech and language therapist

A speech and language therapist can advise on:

- The food and drink textures that are most comfortable and safest for you.
- Ways to make mealtimes easier and safer.
- Techniques that may help you swallow more easily.

A physiotherapist or occupational therapist may also give advice about seating, positioning or equipment that can help at mealtimes.

Follow any advice given by your speech and language therapist:

What else do I need to know?

You may still notice these signs when you are eating and drinking:

- You may cough, choke or clear your throat when you swallow.
- Your voice may sound wet or gurgly after eating and drinking.
- You might get short of breath after eating or drinking.

If you start to feel too uncomfortable or get too tired, stop eating or drinking for a while and try again later after you have had a rest.

Your healthcare team can help you plan what treatments you would want if you do develop a chest infection, lose a lot of weight or become dehydrated.

If someone is choking, call for urgent help – either press the emergency button on a ward or call 999 if you are anywhere else.

Please see https://www.redcross.org.uk/first-aid/learn-first-aid/chokingfor more advice on what to do if someone is choking.

Contact details

Phone: 0116 258 5363 Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm. There is an answerphone if you want to leave a message.

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.

To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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