

SWALLOWING

Swallowing problems can appear at any stage of Parkinson's, affecting some people more than others.

Because swallowing is no longer automatic, it requires a conscious effort on your part. Failure to swallow properly can lead to choking, spluttering and inhaling solids and liquids. This is not only embarrassing but can also be dangerous. Here are a few suggestions for coping with swallowing problems:

- Have an iced soda drink beside you at all times when you are eating. The cold and the bubbles provide a 'cue' to your mouth and throat muscles to swallow. Take frequent sips between bites of food and, if necessary, when you have food in your mouth.
- Take small bites of food; chew thoroughly before you swallow.
- Try to eat food that is warmer or colder than the inside of your mouth. The different temperature will provide a 'cue' for you to swallow.
- Eat quietly at home before social events involving food. This will allow you to enjoy the occasion without fear of embarrassment. If eating takes longer, consider six small meals a day instead of three larger ones.
- Sit in a straight-backed chair while eating and have your chin tucked down. This helps keep food from entering your airway.
- Be careful not to talk with your mouth full as using your airway while eating can lead to choking.
- Avoid dry cereals, crackers, potato chips, crumbly cakes, muffins and whole nuts.
- Avoid sticky foods such as peanut butter, fresh white bread, dry mashed potatoes, bagels, caramel, sticky buns, thick fudge or butterscotch sauce.
- Consider having your partner learn the Heimlich maneuver.
- Ask your doctor for a swallowing assessment by the rehabilitation department in your local hospital.

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Source: Pacific Parkinson's Research Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC