

**ADULT COMMUNITY SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY**  
**Spotlight on Dysphagia**

**Why dysphagia matters:**

Patients experiencing swallowing difficulties may experience one or more of the following:

Chest infection	Aspiration Pneumonia
Choking and death	Weight loss
Hospital admission and extended hospital stay	Poor oral health
Reduced quality of life	

**Who to refer?**

Adults with acquired swallowing difficulties, which can arise because of a range of problems including:

- **Stroke:** 40 – 78% incidence. Of these, 76% will have long term problems
- **COPD:** 27% suffer from dysphagia
- **Dementia, acquired neurological conditions, End of Life Care, general medical disorders (eg UTI, medical decompensation)**

You should consider a referral to SLT for any of the following:

- Frequent coughing or throat clearing when eating and/or drinking
- Person reports sensation of food getting stuck high in throat or difficulty swallowing
- Wet/gurgly voice quality
- Altered breathing pattern after eating and drinking
- Recurrent unexplained chest infections
- Acute weight loss with any of the above

Not all patients will show overt symptoms of swallowing problems: consider possibility of silent aspiration in the “at risk” groups.

Patients are more likely to develop aspiration pneumonia with one or more of the following:

Dependence on oral feeding and/or oral care	Non oral feeding
Suboptimal oral hygiene	Reduced alertness
Multiple medical conditions	Non ambulatory
Multiple medications	Smoker

**Commissioned response times:**

Senior SLT clinicians will triage and prioritise referrals into the following categories:

- **Priority 1: within 10 working days** – eg, Recurrent, unexplained chest infections, sudden, unexplained weight loss, not able to eat/drink (not behavioural)
- **Priority 2: within 20 working days** - eg No short term risk of dehydration, malnutrition, chest infections
- **Priority 3: aim for 13 weeks** - Eg Stable on modified diet/fluids – likely to be upgraded

**How to refer:**

All practices have been sent a paper copy of our referral form, and we have sent electronic copies to surgeries that have requested them, please contact (01284) 748847 if you would like further copies in either format. Forms can be returned to our nhs.net account ([communityslt.suffolk@nhs.net](mailto:communityslt.suffolk@nhs.net)), by post (Speech Therapy Dept, Disability Resource Centre, 4 Bunting Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP32 7BX). Faxes are accepted but are not encouraged (01284 748889).

