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Dysphagia

What is dysphagia?

- Dysphagia is another word for a swallowing disorder. A person with dysphagia may experience difficulty swallowing food, liquid and/or saliva. Some people may be unable to swallow at all. Dysphagia occurs when there is a problem with any part of the swallowing process.

How do we swallow?

- Food or liquid is moved around in the mouth, mixed with saliva and formed into a cohesive mass (bolus).
- The bolus is moved back through the mouth with a front-to-back squeezing action performed by the tongue.
- The bolus enters the throat, triggering a swallow response. Once the response is triggered, breathing momentarily stops, and the airway is closed to prevent food or liquid from passing into the lungs.
- The bolus enters the esophagus (food tube) and is moved to the stomach by a squeezing action of the muscles.

Who is at risk for dysphagia?

- Dysphagia is a common problem that affects people for a variety of reasons. Any condition, treatment or surgery that weakens or damages the muscles and nerves used for swallowing may cause dysphagia, such as:
 - Stroke
 - Aging
 - TIA (Mini-stroke)
 - Side effects of certain medications
 - Xerostomia (dry mouth)
 - Parkinson's disease
 - Injury or surgery to the neck or spine
 - Head injury
 - Cleft palate
 - Head and neck cancer
 - Acid reflux
 - Alzheimer's or other types of dementia

- Multiple Sclerosis

What are some symptoms of dysphagia?

- Coughing/Choking during or after eating or drinking
- Wet, gurgly voice quality after eating or drinking
- Frequent throat clearing during eating or drinking
- Swallowing multiple times to get food down
- Excessive drooling
- Difficulty starting a swallow
- Difficulty clearing food from the mouth or throat after swallowing
- Sensation of food sticking in the throat or chest
- Heartburn or chest pain
- Regurgitation

What are some problems caused by dysphagia?

- Dysphagia can be serious for a number of reasons. Some of the most common complications of swallowing problems are:
 - Pneumonia or other respiratory problems
 - Choking or airway obstruction
 - Malnutrition
 - Dehydration
 - Weight loss
 - Oral yeast infection (thrush/candida)
 - Dental cavities