



Patient & Family Guide

2024

Safe Eating Guidelines

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Safe Eating Guidelines

- Some people have problems swallowing. This means that some food or liquid may go into the airway. This is called aspiration. Aspiration is the word used when food or drink “goes down the wrong way”.
- Not everyone coughs right away when food or liquid goes down the wrong way. This is called silent aspiration.
- Sometimes aspiration can lead to a blocked airway or pneumonia (lung infection). It can also make eating and drinking uncomfortable.

**What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.**

Signs that you may have a swallowing problem:

- Coughing or choking during or after eating
- Clearing your throat often
- Hoarse (rough, scratchy, or cracked) voice
- Wet, gurgly voice
- Feeling like food gets stuck in your throat
- Pocketing food in your cheek
- Holding food or liquid in your mouth for a long time
- Drooling, or loss of food or liquid from your mouth
- Avoiding solid food
- Having a fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- Having a chest infection

The Swallow Team has been involved in your care. They have given you advice on what to eat and drink. There are also Swallow Guidelines that can help you swallow safely.

Safe Swallow Guidelines everyone should follow:

- › Only eat and drink when you are well-rested and alert (fully awake and paying attention to what you are doing).
- › Eat in a quiet area with few distractions. For example, **do not** eat in front of the TV or with a lot of people.
- › Sit up while eating.
- › Stay sitting up for 30 minutes (half an hour) after eating to prevent reflux (food or liquid flowing back into your throat).
- › **Do not** talk while you are eating or drinking.
- › Only eat 1 teaspoon of food at a time.
- › Chew your food well.
- › Take lots of time between bites.
- › Drink from a cup or a glass. **Do not** drink from a bottle or a can.
- › Take only small sips.

Use the supports checked off below:

- Have a support person with you while you eat and drink.
- Have a support person set up your meals (open packages, make sure everything is in reach).
- Have a support person feed you your meals.
- Use the following adaptive (specially designed) utensils: _____

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

More safe swallow recommendations

Only follow the recommendations checked off below:

- Do not** drink while eating. **Never** drink with food in your mouth.
- Do not** use a straw for liquids.
- May use a straw for liquids.
- Place food on the stronger side of your mouth.
- Check mouth after meals for pocketed food.

Medications:

- Take medications as you are able, with food or liquid.
- Take medications whole in pureed food (like applesauce, yogurt, or pudding).
- Take medications crushed in pureed food (like applesauce, yogurt, or pudding). **Ask your pharmacist if it is safe to crush your medications.**

Tips for support persons

- Give the person enough time for each meal. **Do not** rush them while they are eating.
- Make sure their head is:
 - › supported upright.
 - › not extended (tilted) back.
- Sit at the person’s eye level.
- Encourage the person to feed themselves, if possible. You may help them using “hand-over-hand”, if needed.
- If you are feeding the person, watch for each swallow before giving the next bite or sip.
- Check their mouth after meals for pocketed food, if needed.
- Oral (mouth) care should be done after each meal (see pages 5 and 6). Help and support the person in doing oral care as needed.

More recommendations:

Oral care tips

Good oral care is important to lower your risk of pneumonia.

If you have your own teeth (no dentures):

- Brush your teeth:
 - › after each meal.
 - › before bedtime.
- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
- **Do not** rush when you brush your teeth. Brush all surfaces of every tooth.
- Brush your tongue. Use long, sweeping strokes that go from back to front.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste.
- Spit out the toothpaste when you are done brushing. **Do not** rinse your mouth with water after brushing. This helps the fluoride in the toothpaste work better.
- Floss your teeth every day. It may help to use an F or a Y-shaped flossing tool, or GUM® Soft-Picks®.

If you have dentures:

- Remove your dentures and brush them:
 - › each time you eat.
 - › before bedtime.
- Use a denture brush to brush your dentures.
- Use a toothbrush to brush your tongue with water, mouthwash, or toothpaste. Use long, sweeping strokes that go from back to front.
- Rinse your mouth with water or alcohol-free mouthwash, if you are able:
 - › Swish the water or mouthwash around in your mouth and spit it out.
- Soak your dentures overnight in a clean denture cup and denture cleaner.

Call your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or 811 if you have:

- › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- › Trouble breathing
- › More chest congestion (more mucus and coughing)
- › More coughing during or after eating

Dietitian: _____

Phone: _____

Speech Language Pathologist:

Phone: _____

Date: _____

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.