



## Dysphagia (Difficulty Swallowing)

### What is Dysphagia?

Dysphagia is a term used to describe difficulty swallowing. It can occur at any age but is more common in older adults. The act of swallowing involves more than you might think. It requires several muscles and nerves working together to move food from the mouth to the stomach. When something disrupts this process, dysphagia can occur.

### What Causes Dysphagia?

Numerous conditions can cause dysphagia. Doctors often categorize dysphagia into three types based on where the problem occurs:

1. Oral cavity dysphagia: The problem is in the mouth. This can be due to tongue weakness after a stroke, difficulty chewing food, or neuromuscular problems.
2. Oropharyngeal dysphagia: The problem is in the throat. This can be a result of a neurological or muscular spasm.
3. Esophageal dysphagia: The problem is in the esophagus. This can be due to various conditions, including esophageal stricture (narrowing of the esophagus), gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or esophageal tumors.



### What are the Symptoms of Dysphagia?

The symptoms of dysphagia can vary from person to person. Some common signs include:

- Pain while swallowing
- Inability to swallow
- A sensation of food getting stuck in the throat or chest
- Drooling

- Hoarseness
- Food coming back up (regurgitation)
- Frequent heartburn Food or stomach acid backing up into the throat

### What Causes Dysphagia?

Common causes are uncontrolled acid reflux and strictures, or narrowing, of the esophagus due to scar tissue. We see a number of cases due to an allergic condition called eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE). In younger individuals, we find acute esophageal ulceration due to the antibiotic Doxycycline, which is often used to treat severe acne. In older individuals, especially those with atherosclerotic disease, stroke is a common cause of dysphasia. Lastly, in those with chronic acid reflux, Barrett's esophagus, or chronic smokers, the risk of esophageal cancer must be ruled out.

### How is Dysphagia Diagnosed?

Diagnosing dysphagia involves considering both your symptoms and the results of medical tests. Your healthcare provider will also need to determine whether you have other conditions, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), which can have similar symptoms. Tests to diagnose dysphagia may include a barium swallow study, endoscopy, or manometry.

### How is Dysphagia Treated?

Treatment for dysphagia aims to address the underlying cause and ease symptoms. This can involve dietary changes, medication, or, in some cases, a procedure to widen the esophagus or treat the underlying cause. Your healthcare provider will work with you to determine the best treatment plan based on your specific symptoms and needs.

### Conclusion

Dysphagia is a complex condition but understanding it doesn't have to be. By breaking down the medical jargon, we can better understand what dysphagia is, how it affects the body, and what can be done to manage it. If you or a loved one are experiencing symptoms of dysphagia, it's essential to consult with a healthcare provider for a proper diagnosis and treatment plan.

## **Center For Digestive Health & Nutrition**

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The Center for Digestive Health & Nutrition is a private medical practice comprised of experienced Gastroenterologists, Nurse Practitioners, and staff members dedicated to preventing and treating digestive disorders. Our physicians have been serving the needs of those in Western Pennsylvania and surrounding areas since 1977, having cared for tens of thousands of individuals with digestive problems. Our mission is to deliver high-quality gastroenterology services efficiently and cost-consciously. We realize the very sensitive nature of GI illness and understand the necessity to provide our services in an environment that stresses patient privacy and confidentiality and where patient satisfaction is the goal. Appointments can be conveniently scheduled online via our website above. Learn more about digestive issues on Instagram @thedigestivetract

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