

## Swallowing

Dysphagia is difficulty in swallowing.

- caused by weakness and paralysis of the lips, facial muscles, tongue, larynx and pharynx resulting from affected trigeminal, facial, glossopharyngeal, vagus, accessory and hypoglossal nerves.
- eventually affects about two thirds of people with motor neurone disease

Swallowing difficulties should be assessed and regularly reviewed by a speech pathologist. The goal of managing swallowing difficulties is to maintain optimal levels of nutrition and hydration and to reduce choking episodes (MND Australia 2014).

## MND Australia 2014

### Effects of dysphagia include:

- impaired ability to form a lip seal, chew, form a bolus and propel food/fluid with the tongue
- impaired swallow reflex
- impaired airway protection during the swallow

### Results of dysphagia include:

- drooling
- dehydration and malnutrition
- aspiration and resultant chest infections which contribute to impaired respiratory function
- severe coughing - choking risk

### A person's needs include:

- assessment and monitoring of swallow, advice concerning food and fluid consistency, modification of diet, modified eating and drinking utensils, percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) - consult speech pathologist
- advice concerning modified plates, cups, cup holders, cutlery, and non-slip matting - consult occupational therapist
- assessment and advice concerning nutritional intake and PEG - consult dietitian
- head and neck support and positioning - consult physiotherapist
- training carers to perform assisted cough - consult physiotherapist
- information concerning managing swallowing difficulties, nutrition and PEG - consult MND Association Family Support Service
- see Referral Pathways

## Nutritional management algorithm (Miller and others 2009a)

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#### KEY

\* = e.g., Bulbar questions in the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Functional Rating Scale, or other instrument.

‡ = Prolonged meal time; ending meal prematurely because of fatigue; accelerated weight loss due to poor caloric intake; family concern about feeding difficulties.

† = Percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy: rule out contraindications.