Transcript

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

An Introduction to Swallowing Difficulties  
for Residential Aged Care Providers and Workers

**Presented by:**

Speaker

[*Opening visual of slide with text saying ‘Swallowing difficulties’, ‘For residential providers and staff’, ‘Food, nutrition and dining’*]

[*The visuals during this video are of various aged care residents in dining settings and images of different types of foods*]

§(Music Playing)§

**Speaker:**

Swallowing is complicated and can be affected by many things. Every resident who has problems with swallowing will be different and have different contributing factors, different risks and different wishes. They need an individual approach which may change over time.

Is the person you’re caring for taking a long time to eat? Do you notice food staying in their mouth for a long time or that they are coughing more than usual especially as they eat and drink? Have they had a choking incident? Do they seen unable to keep eating after a few mouthfuls of food? Or perhaps they’re avoiding certain foods because they’re hard to chew or swallow. They might tell you that swallowing is difficult or painful. These are some of the clues they may be having swallowing problems. These problems can happen during or after eating or drinking.

[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Long time to eat’, ‘Food staying in the mouth’, ‘Coughing’, ‘Choking’, ‘Unable to keep eating’, ‘Avoiding certain foods’, ‘Difficulty swallowing’*]

Swallowing difficulties also known as dysphagia can impact on the physical and mental health of residents in your care. It can cause food or drinks to go down the wrong way and enter the airway or lungs instead of the stomach.

[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Swallowing difficulties’, ‘Dysphagia’*]

This can cause discomfort, coughing, choking and sometimes pneumonia. It can cause the person to not be able to eat and drink enough to meet their needs.

[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Discomfort’, ‘Coughing’, ‘Choking’, ‘Pneumonia’*]

As a care worker you play a crucial role in making sure people with swallowing difficulties have safe and enjoyable mealtimes in aged care. Your ability to recognise and act on these telltale signs can have a positive impact on their lives. If you notice possible signs of swallowing difficulties you need to talk to your manager as soon as possible so that a clinical assessment can be completed.

With your resident’s agreement the care team will refer them to the appropriate support. This may include a speech pathologist who will complete a detailed swallow assessment, identify what might be causing or contributing to difficulties swallowing and provide management recommendations. A speech pathologist will develop a mealtime support plan in consultation with the resident and their care team. They will provide information to support the resident to make an informed choice. This may include them recommending a change to the texture of food and/or drinks. Referral to a dietician may also help make sure the person is getting enough nutritional intake. Then they may recommend strategies to help the resident based on their situation and needs.

Implement the mealtime support plan with the resident. The plan may include your resident having texture modified food and drinks to make swallowing more comfortable, safe and easier. Other strategies can look at addressing the person’s alertness and posture, having smaller more frequent meals, varied foods and mealtime support and supervision. Make sure everyone involved is aware of all parts of the plan. Review the mealtime support plan regularly and when the resident asks, with them and health professionals.

Providers have a responsibility to make sure they have strategies and processes to support mealtimes. They must also provide their staff with ongoing training including mealtime support, identifying signs of swallowing changes and the preparation of the resident’s food specific to their needs. With the right preparation and consideration you can still make texture modified food look, smell and taste good while also meeting a resident’s preference and providing variety and choice. A dietician can help you learn how to do this and also help make sure the resident’s diet meets their nutrition and hydration needs.

**Ravi:**

At first I wasn’t too excited by the soft food. Food is such an important part of my culture. But the texture is just right for me to swallow and the chef shapes the veggies to look like the original. Best of all I still get to eat with everyone else.

**Helen:**

I was unsure about starting pureed food and thickened drinks and I began to eat less. My team shared some ideas and now I’m eating more tasty food and lots of snacks. The food is delicious and now I have more energy when my grandkids come to visit.

**Speaker:**

Your actions in recognising the signs of swallowing difficulties and referring your residents for specialist advice will improve their nutrition and dining experience giving them a more fulfilling life.

Take a look at our fact sheets, videos and webinars on the Commission website to find out more about how you can support residents with swallowing difficulties. Or call the Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline on 1800 844 044.

[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline’, ‘1800 844 044’*]

You can also learn more on ALIS, the Aged Care Learning Information Solution.

[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Australian Government with Crest (logo)’, ‘Aged Care Quality and Safe Commission’, ‘learning.agedcarequality.gov.au’*]

Let’s work together to support safe and enjoyable mealtimes for all residents.

[*Closing visual of slide with text saying ‘Let’s work together’*]

[End of Transcript]