



Swallowing Problems (Dysphagia)

What is dysphagia?

Dysphagia (*dis-fay-juh*) is a swallowing problem that occurs in one or more of the phases of swallowing. The phases of swallowing are:

- **oral** – preparatory phase in which food is placed in the mouth, chewed, manipulated and transferred back to the throat ready for swallowing.
- **pharyngeal** – phase in which food is passed over the base of the tongue (swallowed) to be squeezed past the airway, closing it off to prevent food or liquid from entering (aspiration) and to prevent choking.
- **esophageal** – phase in which food squeezes down to the stomach through the food tube (esophagus).

What causes dysphagia?

Swallowing problems may be associated with many disorders and have a number of underlying causes. In infants, causes may be more developmental in nature, resulting from premature birth, low birth weight or reflux.

Older children may have dysphagia as a result of:

- structural abnormalities such as cleft lip, palate, or head/neck abnormalities
- medical conditions such as gastrointestinal or neurological problems or traumatic head injuries
- developmental delays
- medications
- problematic parent-child interaction at meal times.

How do I know if my child has dysphagia?

In infants and young children, signs and symptoms may include:

- delay in meeting feeding milestones
- impairment of normal weight gain
- low interest in feeding or meals
- tension in the body while feeding
- refusal to eat foods that have certain textures
- prolonged feedings of 30 minutes or longer
- food or liquid leaking from the mouth
- coughing or gagging when eating or nursing
- spitting up or vomiting during feeding or meals
- strained breathing while eating and drinking.

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Kenny Kids™ Pediatric Rehabilitation Program Locations

Kenny Kids – Buffalo

*Across the street from
Buffalo Hospital*
300 Catlin St., Suite 101
Buffalo, MN 55313
763-684-3888

Kenny Kids – Coon Rapids

3111 124th Ave. NW
Coon Rapids, MN 55433
763-236-7337

Kenny Kids – Owatonna

Owatonna Hospital
2250 NW 26th St.
Owatonna, MN 55060
507-977-2150



Swallowing Problems (Dysphagia) (cont'd)

Other symptoms of dysphagia may include:

- hesitation or inability to swallow
- difficult or painful swallowing
- constant feeling of a lump in the throat or food sticking
- food coming up (regurgitation) through the throat or nose
- frequent, repetitive swallowing or necessity to “wash down” food
- excessive throat clearing
- “gurgly” sounding voice after eating
- hoarse voice or recurrent sore throat
- coughing during or after swallowing.

What do I do if my child has a swallowing problem?

If you suspect your child may have dysphagia, share your concerns with your pediatrician, who will provide you with a referral to a speech-language pathologist to evaluate your child’s speech production.

What is the prognosis for dysphagia?

The prognosis for each child will depend on a variety of factors, including severity and cause of the disorder, age at intervention, response to treatment and external support system (parents, school, etc.).

LEARN MORE ABOUT DYSPHAGIA

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DEAFNESS AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

www.nidcd.nih.gov

AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION

www.asha.org

DYSPHAGIA RESOURCE CENTER

www.dysphagia.com