



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Risk feeding; A guide for patients, families and carers

Issued by speech and language therapy

Setting the scene

If you are having problems with your swallow, it could mean that the food or drink is going down ‘the wrong way’ and into your lungs instead of your stomach. This is known as aspiration and could happen for many reasons (for example following a stroke, or for those with dementia, or progressive neurological conditions – MND, Parkinson’s disease etc). Sometimes people might be coughing or sounding wet or gurgly because of this, but sometimes this can happen silently with no outward signs.

When this is thought to be happening, speech and language therapists complete an assessment of their swallow and will often advise for either different types of food or drink (e.g. thickened fluids or blending your food down) or to be nil-by-mouth (NBM).

The doctors will consider and discuss with you whether feeding you by a tube, either temporarily or permanently is appropriate, if you are unable to eat and drink anything.

What is risk feeding?

Sometimes people decide that they do not want to be fed via a tube or the doctors feel it is not appropriate. This might be because they are nearing the end of their life, cannot tolerate the tube or because they have stated they do not want this.

This is when we consider ‘risk feeding’ - deciding to eat and drink despite the risks of aspiration involved, often as it is felt to improve your quality of life.

Risks include:

- Coughing or choking on your food/ drink
- Chest infections or pneumonia

These can sometimes lead to death.

The speech and language therapist can help by assessing your swallow and suggesting what kinds of food and drink might be the easiest for you and the least risky. They can also help think about safer alternatives to your favourite foods/ drinks.

Your recommendations for eating and drinking:

Food:

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Drinks:

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Medication:

Other advice/ strategies:

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If you have any questions or concerns regarding the above information, please contact the speech and language therapy team or the medical team.

Name of hospital speech and language therapist:

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Contact telephone number:

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Community speech and language therapy team and telephone number:

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Please do not hesitate to contact the hospital speech and language therapist (or community speech and language therapy team if you are now at home) if you would like a review of your swallow. You may want one if:

- you feel your swallow has improved
- you have changed your mind and don't want to risk feed anymore
- you would like more advice on appropriate food or drinks.

For more information, please see Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (www.rcslt.org.uk)

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

www.northumbria.nhs.uk



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