

SWALLOWING TIPS

These are general suggestions: A specific program should be planned on an individual basis with the help of a professional team.

General Body I. Positioning and Environment	Do	Don't
Head Positioning	Keep head level or tilted slightly forward.	Avoid letting your head lean backwards, even momentarily when you swallow. This action exposes your airway to food.
Trunk Positioning	Keep your trunk at approximately 90 degrees whenever possible, especially when drinking liquids. Sit upright in a firm chair with head erect, both feet firmly on the floor.	Avoid eating or drinking when reclining.
Environment	Take one bite at a time. “Think” about each bite. Allow more time for meals. 5 small meals a day are easier than 3 large meals. Make mealtime as pleasant and relaxed as possible. Your most valuable tool will be an ongoing food diary listing what you ate, what strategies you tried, and how easy or difficult it was to swallow. A sample diary is included at the end of this section.	Avoid speaking when eating. Avoid distractions if eating is very difficult. Never hurrrv!

II. Mouth Stage (Oral Transit)	Do	Don't
Lip Seal	Be aware of your lip position. Lip balm (especially flavored) can increase your self-monitoring. Keep your lips tightly closed after inserting food or liquids.	Avoid keeping your lips open continually. Otherwise your mouth will become extremely dry and seepage will be a problem.
Jaw Position	Keep jaw closed whenever possible. As soon as food has been inserted, close your lips and teeth tightly before you begin to chew and swallow.	
Drooling	<p><i>Swallow</i> often</p> <p>Keep your teeth and lips closed. Keep a handkerchief or kleenex near.</p> <p>While eating, watch for seepage of liquids.</p>	<p>Avoid poor positioning. When you are not eating or drinking, keep your head level.</p> <p>Avoid the jaw open, head down positions which together exaggerate a drooling problem.</p>
Tongue	<p>If moving the food from front to back is a problem, suck your cheeks inward and consciously “think” through the following steps. (Tongue tip up, pull back the tongue, back of the tongue up.) Be careful of food falling off of the back of tongue before you are ready to swallow. See hold maneuver. Place the food in the mid-to-back area of the tongue.</p> <p>If it is difficult to move food in your mouth, perhaps a change in consistency can help.</p> <p>If room temperature liquids are a problem, change the temperature to cool or warm.</p>	<p>Avoid placing food on the tip of your tongue, if tongue movement is difficult.</p> <p>You may need to avoid <i>very</i> hot and cold foods or drinks. Cool or warm temperatures are usually better.</p>

III. Throat Stage
(Pharyngeal Stage)

Do

Don't

If gagging is a problem, place the food toward the back of your tongue in a gentle, slow, firm movement. You may need to place the food closer to the middle portion of the tongue to avoid a premature gag.

If taking pills with water is a problem, experiment with placing the pill in a small bite of mashed potatoes or pudding.

If thin liquids seem to make you choke more readily, change to thicker liquids. Refer to diet hierarchy.

If it is difficult to initiate a swallow, refer to swallowing techniques.

Remember to take only 1 bite at a time.

Small (1/3 teaspoon) bites can make a substantial difference in the ability to manage the bolus in the throat.

Coughing is a protective mechanism and can help avoid aspiration.

A dry throat with sticky phlegm can make it hard for food to pass without sticking. To discourage food sticking to the mucous try the following: Take a small (1/3 teaspoon) spoon of liquid (choose the consistency optimal for you) then swallow. Remember to keep drinking fluids throughout the day to prevent dehydration, thick secretions, bladder or kidney problems. Liquids may need to be thick and you may need something constantly on hand to insure adequate intake.

Don't drop the food in the back of your tongue. Firmly run the spoon from the front to the back of the tongue with a slow movement.

Don't be embarrassed to cough if you are in public.

Don't breathe in when you are in mid-swallow. Complete your chewing and swallowing before you take a breath.