



## FACT SHEET

# Strategies for Communication and Swallowing

Depending on the size, location and treatment of the tumour, the following symptoms may be present:

- Changes in speech production
- Difficulty understanding or expressing information
- Changes in personality or memory which may lead to changes to communication style
- Difficulty swallowing

**Speech Pathologists may be able to assist in managing these symptoms.**

**The following are some general strategies that may be useful.**

### Communication Strategies

#### **Strategies to make speech clearer:**

- Slow down and speak louder
- Exaggerate sounds and stress each syllable
- Open mouth wider and move lips and tongue more when talking
- Pause between words and take a breath
- Swallow often to clear mouth of saliva

#### **Communicating with people who have difficulty understanding or expressing themselves:**

- Avoid distractions and background noise. Be aware that group settings are often more difficult than individual conversations
- Allow plenty of time for the person to talk and encourage all attempts to communicate
- Acknowledge frustration
- Speak naturally but slowly and clearly, using simple short sentences with many pauses
- Check if the person has understood you. If the person does not understand, try and say the message in a different way, write it or draw a picture
- Use gesture and facial expression
- Clearly identify people or topics you are going to talk about and don't change topic quickly
- Do not presume or pretend to understand an unclear message. Ask questions to clarify – ask what the topic is, give a choice of two words (e.g. do you want tea or juice?), or ask a yes/no question (e.g. do you want tea?)
- Get the person to gesture, write or draw
- Try not to interrupt or answer for the person
- Provide a model rather than correcting mistakes
- Understand that swearing or inappropriate behaviour may be associated with the condition



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### Swallowing Strategies

The muscles used for swallowing may be weak, work too slowly or are not well coordinated. This may lead to difficulty managing normal foods and drinks and may place the person at risk of 'aspiration' (when food, drink or saliva goes into the lungs instead of the stomach). This can lead to chest infections or pneumonia.

#### Signs & symptoms of swallowing difficulties

- Drooling of food or saliva from mouth
- Gurgly or wet voice after eating or drinking
- Coughing or choking on food or drink
- Food left in the mouth after eating
- Noisy or clunky (uncoordinated) swallow
- Long duration of meals
- Unexplained weight loss
- Chest infections of unexplained cause

**If you notice any of these  
warning signs, speak to the  
Nurse or Doctor and ask them  
to contact the  
Speech Pathologist.**

### Safe Swallowing Strategies

- Ensure that the foods provided are consistent with the Speech Pathologist and/or Dietitian's recommendations
- Feed only when awake and alert. Postpone feeding if the person is drowsy
- Upright position for eating or drinking with the head straight (not tilted back)
- Take small mouthfuls or sips, one at a time
- Swallow each mouthful before the next
- Check the mouth is clear of food after a meal
- If voice sounds wet, clear throat and swallow again. Stop eating/drinking if short of breath or coughing
- Remain upright for 20-30 minutes after meal
- Do not rush mealtimes - meals should be relaxing and pleasant

### How to Refer

- **Contact the Speech Pathologists**

Cancer Therapy Centre  
LIVERPOOL HOSPITAL  
Tel. (02) 9828 5180

**Or ask a Cancer Therapy Centre staff member to contact the Speech Pathologist for you.**

#### You should provide the following:-

- Contact details
- Medical History
- Description of the problem