



Oesophageal Dysphagia – Eating & Drinking Tips

Oesophageal dysphagia is when it's hard to swallow food or drink because of a problem in your **food pipe (oesophagus)**.

Why it happens

- **Oesophageal dysmotility:** Weak or uncoordinated oesophagus muscles make food move slowly.
- **Oesophageal spasm:** Sudden tight squeezes can stop food from moving.
- **Outflow obstruction:** Food or drink can get stuck and move slowly into the stomach.

Common symptoms

- Food “sticking” in your throat
- Discomfort or pain when eating
- Coughing while eating
- Food coming back up (regurgitation)
- Heartburn
- Bad taste or bad breath
- Chest pain
- Weight loss
- Bloating

Tips for Eating and Drinking Comfortably

1. Food choices

- Choose soft, moist foods and add sauces, gravy, or custard to help swallow.
- Mash, puree, or liquidise foods if needed.
- Avoid tough or “stubborn” foods like bread, hard meat, or stodgy potato.
- Avoid acidic foods and drinks (citrus, tomatoes, juice).
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes.
- Try lightly fizzy drinks (like sparkling water or minerals) – they can sometimes help “tickle” the junction between the oesophagus and stomach, encouraging it to open and letting food pass more easily.
- Watch the temperature of food and drinks – some people find warm easier to swallow than cold. Try both to see what works for you.

2. How to eat

- Take **small mouthfuls** and chew **well until food is very soft**.
 - Eat **slowly** and take a **small sip of drink between bites**.
 - Take an **extra swallow of saliva** between mouthfuls.
 - Eat **smaller meals more often** (“little and often”).
 - Don’t eat too late – try to stop **three to four hours before bed**.
 - **Relax** while eating – stress slows digestion and can make swallowing harder.
 - **Posture matters:** Sit **upright with your back vertical**. After meals, stay upright for about 60 minutes.
 - If you have an **outflow obstruction or achalasia**, **standing up** or **raising your arms** may help food pass.
 - Be careful not to eat too much if the first bites have not passed into the stomach – it will just “pile up” in your oesophagus. Pause for a bit and try again later.
 - A short walk (5-10 minutes) after eating can help move things along.
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3. Keep your bowels moving

Constipation can make swallowing and bloating worse. To help your bowels work:

- Include fibre-rich foods like porridge, vegetables and fruit.
 - Puree or mash them if needed – this keeps the fibre intact (unlike juicing, which removes it).
 - Vegetables can also be made into soups or liquidised dishes to improve swallowing and flow through the oesophagus.
 - Eat **one to two kiwis per day** – they are gentle on your stomach and very effective for moving things along.
 - Drink plenty of water (aim for 1.5 L per day unless your doctor says otherwise).
 - Move regularly – walking, swimming, yoga or gardening help your digestion.
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4. Maximising your nutrition

If you are **losing weight** or need more energy:

1. **Fortify meals** – add butter, olive oil or mayonnaise to foods.
 2. Use **full-fat milk, cream or cheese**.
 3. Add **cheese** to soups, mashed potato, pasta or scrambled eggs.
 4. Add **cream or condensed milk** to puddings.
 5. Use **skimmed milk powder** to increase nutrition in milk, cereals, soups, or mashed potato. *(four tablespoons to one pint of milk works well.)*
 6. Eat **smaller meals more often** – three meals, plus two to three snacks a day.
 7. Have **puddings** with meals.
 8. Consider **Complan shakes or soups** (or Fortisip/Ensure if prescribed) between meals for extra calories and protein.
 9. **Monitor your weight** and see a dietitian if needed.
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Summary – Key Points

- Eat **soft, moist foods** and chew well.
- Eat **slowly**, in **small portions**, and take breaks between bites.
- **Relaxation and posture** are crucial – stress slows digestion, and sitting upright helps gravity move food.
- Keep **bowels regular** with fibre, kiwis, water and daily movement.
- Try **little and often** meals, and avoid late evening eating.
- Experiment with **food temperature** and **lightly fizzy drinks** to see what helps.
- Extra calories and protein can be added if needed to maintain weight.