

EATING, SWALLOWING AND SALIVA

Some people with Parkinson's may experience difficulties eating and swallowing. This is because Parkinson's can cause muscles in the jaw and face to become stiff, which affects the control of chewing and swallowing.

Another symptom can be production of saliva, that is thicker and stickier. Alternately, other people may experience a dry mouth.

EATING AND SWALLOWING

The medical term for swallowing difficulties is dysphagia. Some of the signs of dysphagia are:

- coughing when eating or drinking
- difficulty swallowing certain foods, fluids or medications
- meals taking longer to finish than usual
- unexplained weight loss or loss of appetite
- repeated chest infections
- beverages needed to wash down food
- drooling
- choking on foods, liquids or saliva.

A person with *dysphagia* is at risk of weight loss, malnutrition and dehydration. Taking medication can become difficult. Food and drink can 'go down the wrong way' which can lead to chest infections and occasionally, pneumonia.

Dysphagia can also impact quality of life as the person affected may feel embarrassed and become anxious about eating.

TIPS TO OVERCOME SWALLOWING PROBLEMS

- sit up straight when eating and drinking
- take small mouthfuls and sips
- reduce distractions and avoid talking while chewing and swallowing
- be alert to fever and coughs and seek help immediately when they occur
- eat and drink during your medication 'on' period.

EXCESS SALIVA

Saliva is necessary for digestion. It lubricates the throat to make swallowing easier and contains chemicals that break down food. Saliva also assists with oral hygiene as it helps break down plaque.

Some people with Parkinson's develop problems controlling their saliva, which can lead to drooling or dribbling. The medical term for this is sialorrhea. Research shows this can affect more than half of people with Parkinson's.

When you have Parkinson's, the natural tendency to swallow slows down. If you swallow less, saliva can pool in your mouth and, instead of being swallowed, it can overflow from the corners of your mouth.

Saliva problems can lead to cracks developing in the corners of your mouth, which can lead to talking, eating or drinking difficulties. It can also lead to problems with your teeth and infections in your mouth.

TIPS FOR SALIVA MANAGEMENT

- make a conscious effort to swallow your saliva often
- be aware of foods that stimulate or make saliva stickier, eg, sugary or milky drinks
- ask your GP or specialist for medication that can help reduce or control saliva production.

DRY MOUTH

Some people experience dry mouth problems.

Saliva acts as a lubricant during chewing and swallowing and therefore a dry mouth may feel uncomfortable. Saliva also has antibacterial properties to protect your teeth and mouth from decay and to neutralise acidic foods.



TIPS FOR LUBRICATING A DRY MOUTH

- take frequent sips of water so you do not become dehydrated
- use lip balm to keep your lips moist, particularly in the corners of your mouth
- remove and clean dentures at night to give your mouth chance to recover
- ask your pharmacist about oral lubricants and artificial saliva products
- visit your dentist regularly.

FREECALL INFORMATION LINE

1800 644 189

SUPPORT FOR YOU

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms detailed, you should work with your GP to put together a team of health specialists to support you, including:

- a **speech pathologist** who can identify specific areas of difficulty, eg, lip seal, swallowing problems, tongue awareness, and suggest exercises to help overcome them. A speech pathologist can also assist with exercises to strengthen swallow and reduce difficulties created by saliva.
- a **dietitian** for advice about diet and foods that impact, saliva, swallowing and mouth dryness.
- a **physiotherapist** for advice on exercises to improve posture so saliva doesn't pool at the front of your mouth.
- an **occupational therapist** to advise on seating that will improve swallow.

Ask your GP to develop a chronic disease management plan, which will allow you a limited number of Medicare rebated visits to allied healthcare professionals.

**Information provided by Parkinson's Victoria,
providing help for today and hope for tomorrow.**

CONTACT US

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