



## Dysphagia (Swallowing difficulty)

The definition of dysphagia is the difficult passage of food from the mouth to the stomach during swallowing. The inability to eat safely and effectively for extended periods of time can generate frustration, anxiety and depression. The risk for dehydration and malnutrition is increased, as well as the risk for aspiration. To manage this risk your health professional may have prescribed a diet texture and a thickened fluid to manage your dysphagia.

### Why do I need a dysphagia diet?

Someone with dysphagia has a decreased ability to consume sufficient foods and fluids. Swallowing difficulties negatively impacts the nutritional status. Undiagnosed and/or unmanaged dysphagia has been associated with increased risk for malnutrition, dehydration, choking episodes, aspiration, chest infections or pneumonia and even death <sup>(1)</sup>. Dysphagia diet, meaning diet modification and fluid thickness modification, is one of the recommended methods to manage dysphagia and risk for aspiration.

### What is a dysphagia diet?

A dysphagia diet is free of dry, hard or chunky like nuts, popcorn, crumbly or dry cookies; coarse cooked cereals with bran, nuts, or seeds; any “lumpy” texture such as rice pudding; mixed consistency sauces, soups or dressings, skins and bones in meat, stringy or coarse textures in potatoes and fruits, and are not too spicy.

Modified textures foods may never be runny, lumpy, sticky or too dry. Adding sauces or gravy is recommended to keep foods moist and aid in the swallowing process. Therapeutic Meals created a variety of foods offered in modified diet textures, and offers a great selection of sauces and gravy.

### How can a Registered Dietitian help someone with dysphagia?

The RD can screen for swallowing difficulty, and recommend diet modification and fluid thickness. However, further assessment is recommended to manage dysphagia to help manage risk for aspiration. The RD at Therapeutic Meals is able to communicate with the health professionals in acute care facilities upon your consent. These consultations with acute care health professionals can provide you with a smooth continuation of your treatment after discharge from hospital. The RD can consult with a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), or request a follow up assessment by a SLP.

The overall goal of implementing diet textured food is to increase your ability to take in sufficient amount of foods and reduce your risk for aspiration. The dietitian can further help you meeting your needs by recommending energy dense foods or (thickened) liquid supplements.

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1 (Defining the Role of the Dietitian in Dysphagia Assessment and Management A Statement of Dietitians of Canada MARCH 2015).

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