



Swallowing Problems

Dysphagia

Dysphagia is the medical term for difficulty swallowing. It can be caused by weakness or incoordination of the mouth and throat muscles to move food from the mouth towards the stomach. Signs of dysphagia may include:

- difficulty moving food around the mouth or clearing food from the mouth
- coughing, choking, or throat clearing when eating or drinking
- “gurgly”/wet sounding voice during or after eating or drinking
- complaints of food getting stuck in the throat
- repeated bouts of pneumonia
- unexplained weight loss.

Approximately 55% of people who have a stroke have swallowing difficulties during the first days and weeks¹. Many people regain their swallowing ability within the first month after the stroke. However, as many as 35% of people still have some swallowing difficulties three months after the stroke.¹

Swallowing Screening

As dysphagia can lead to serious complications post-stroke, all persons with suspected stroke need to be screened for dysphagia before eating/drinking upon admission. The Toronto Bedside Swallowing Screening Test (TOR-BSST[®]) is used at Lakeridge health for swallowing screenings. If the person fails the screening, a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) will complete a full swallowing assessment. Following the assessment, the SLP may recommend changes to the foods and/or liquids a person is consuming as well as strategies and procedures to manage the difficulties.

1.
[SAC. Stroke Awareness - SAC. SAC. Published May 5, 2023. https://www.sac-oac.ca/practice-resources/toolkits/stroke-awareness/](https://www.sac-oac.ca/practice-resources/toolkits/stroke-awareness/)