

SWALLOWING WORKSHEET

Parkinson's can present a variety of problems related to swallowing, ranging from minor complaints when swallowing pills to severe difficulty chewing tough foods like steak and hard breads. Swallowing issues are important to address because of the potential risk of aspiration pneumonia, caused when saliva, liquids or food is breathed into the lungs instead of being swallowed into the esophagus and stomach. Many swallowing issues can be easily addressed with specific swallowing exercises and minor changes in diet. It is a good idea to consult with a licensed speech language pathologist to identify problem areas and improve swallowing ability through intentional exercises. The worksheet below provides changes to help with swallowing challenges; check those you can incorporate into your daily routine now.

Swallowing Tips

- Cut food into smaller pieces.
- Take smaller bites when eating.
- Avoid gulping, big sips when drinking.
- Avoid straws if you have a swallowing problem, as using a straw may promote choking.
- Alternate food with sips of fluid to help your swallowing tract remain clear. This is especially helpful if you have dry mouth.

Lifestyle Changes

- Don't eat when overly tired. Try to eat before you reach that point.
- Eat at the table. This helps avoid distractions, allowing you to focus on eating.
- Eat sitting straight. A chair at the table is better for posture than the couch or recliner.
- Don't stop going to restaurants if this is enjoyable to you. Call ahead to discuss your concerns. Typically a chef can prepare your meal to meet your needs. You can ask for a specific table if you are self-conscious. Early-bird specials are not only cheaper, they're often less crowded and less noisy!

Dietary Tips

- Avoid dry, flaky foods like cornbread, toast, rice or cake unless it is moist. Sauces and gravy help keep your food tasty and moist.
- Switch to thicker liquids. Thin liquids and water are often more difficult to swallow. Mix pills in applesauce or yogurt if you have trouble swallowing.
- Try eating papaya fruit or drinking papaya juice to thin your saliva if it feels too thick.
- Drink adequate fluids, but give yourself more time to do so.
- Whether you have too much saliva in your mouth or not enough, try sucking on small suckers, lemon candy or chewing gum. Although this creates more saliva, it will prompt you to swallow more frequently.
- Ask for a swallowing evaluation if you are coughing, drooling, feeling like you have trouble clearing your throat or swallowing pills, are changing your diet due to swallowing concerns or are losing weight.
- Always report changes in swallowing to your doctor.