



End Stage of Dementia and Assisting with Eating

In the end stages of dementia, swallowing difficulties become increasingly common, often leading to an inability to swallow properly, which can result in choking, aspiration pneumonia, weight loss, and dehydration, signifying a significant decline in the person's health and nearing the end of life; this is considered a normal part of the disease progression and requires careful management with specialized feeding techniques and support from us as healthcare professionals.

Key points about swallowing difficulties in end-stage dementia:

Dysphagia:

The medical term for swallowing difficulties, which becomes more prevalent as dementia progresses.

Aspiration risk:

When food or liquid enters the lungs instead of the stomach due to impaired swallowing, potentially leading to pneumonia.

Management strategies:

- **Food texture modification:** Pureed or soft foods, thickened liquids to slow down swallowing.
- **Positioning:** Sitting upright during meals to facilitate swallowing.
- **Small bites:** Offering small amounts of food frequently.
- Make sure the person has **swallowed** before introducing more food. Sometimes food can be pocketed in the cheeks.
- Don't hurry the person. Give them time to chew and swallow each mouthful before taking another bite.
- Don't feed a person who is drowsy or lying down. They should be in an upright, seated position during the meal and for at least 20 minutes after the meal.
- Say "swallow" to remind the person to swallow.

