



FlexiLearnHub

Knowledge Hub

Professional Resources for Care, Catering & Hospitality

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Recognising the Signs of Dysphagia

A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 003

Version 1.0

First Published: July 2026



www.flexilearnhub.com

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About This Resource

Recognising the Signs of Dysphagia

A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff

Supporting Early Awareness of Swallowing Difficulties

Dysphagia is the medical term used to describe swallowing difficulties. It can affect people of all ages but is more common in older adults and individuals living with certain medical conditions or neurological disorders.

Recognising possible signs of dysphagia is an important part of providing safe, person-centred care. Early awareness can help ensure that concerns are reported promptly, allowing individuals to receive appropriate assessment and support from qualified healthcare professionals.

This guide has been developed by **FlexiLearnHub** to increase awareness of the possible signs of dysphagia and to promote safe, professional practice in care settings.

Purpose of this Resource

This guide has been designed to help readers:

- ✓ Understand what dysphagia is.
- ✓ Recognise some of the possible signs of swallowing difficulties.
- ✓ Understand why early recognition is important.
- ✓ Know when concerns should be reported.
- ✓ Promote safer eating and drinking through good awareness.

Suitable For

- Care Assistants
- Senior Carers
- Nurses
- Care Home Managers
- Support Workers
- Catering Teams
- Family Carers

Important Information

This guide is intended for awareness only. Recognising possible signs of dysphagia does not confirm that an individual has a swallowing difficulty. Any concerns should be reported promptly in line with your organisation's procedures so that appropriate assessment can be arranged by a suitably qualified healthcare professional.

Continue Learning

Develop a deeper understanding of dysphagia awareness, safer eating and drinking, and the IDDSI Framework through the **FlexiLearnHub Dysphagia Awareness & IDDSI Framework Training Course**.

Visit:

www.flexilearnhub.com

This guide forms part of the FlexiLearnHub Dysphagia & IDDSI Awareness Series, developed to support professional awareness, safer practice and continuous learning across health and social care settings.

Recognising the Possible Signs of Dysphagia

Being Aware of Possible Signs

Individuals living with dysphagia may experience a range of signs or symptoms that can affect eating, drinking and swallowing. While these signs do not confirm that a person has dysphagia, recognising them early can help ensure appropriate assessment and support are arranged.

Care staff play an important role in observing changes and reporting concerns in line with their organisation's procedures.

Possible Signs That May Be Observed

The following may indicate that an individual is experiencing swallowing difficulties:

- ✓ Coughing or choking during or after eating and drinking
- ✓ A wet, gurgly or hoarse sounding voice after swallowing
- ✓ Food or drink remaining in the mouth after swallowing
- ✓ Difficulty chewing or swallowing food
- ✓ Taking significantly longer than usual to finish meals
- ✓ Avoiding certain foods or drinks
- ✓ Unexplained weight loss or poor appetite
- ✓ Recurrent chest infections or aspiration pneumonia
- ✓ Complaints of food feeling "stuck" in the throat
- ✓ Frequent throat clearing during meals

Remember

Experiencing one or more of these signs does **not** necessarily mean that an individual has dysphagia. However, any concerns should be reported promptly so that appropriate assessment can be considered.

Good Practice Reminder

Never ignore changes in a person's ability to eat or drink safely. Early recognition and timely reporting can help support appropriate care and reduce potential risks.

Why Early Recognition Matters

Recognising Concerns Early Can Make a Difference

Swallowing difficulties can affect an individual's health, wellbeing and quality of life. Recognising possible signs early and reporting concerns promptly helps ensure that appropriate assessment and support can be arranged.

Early recognition allows the wider care team to review an individual's needs and, where appropriate, seek advice from suitably qualified healthcare professionals.

Why Early Awareness Is Important

Early recognition may help to:

- ✓ Promote safer eating and drinking.
 - ✓ Reduce the risk of avoidable complications.
 - ✓ Support good nutrition and hydration.
 - ✓ Improve comfort and dignity during mealtimes.
 - ✓ Encourage timely assessment by appropriate healthcare professionals.
 - ✓ Support person-centred care.
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Working as a Team

Providing safe mealtime support is a shared responsibility.

Good communication between care staff, catering teams, nurses, managers, Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), dietitians and other healthcare professionals helps ensure individuals receive the support they need.

Every member of the team has an important role in observing, communicating and following agreed care plans.

Remember

Care staff are not expected to diagnose dysphagia. Their role is to recognise possible concerns, follow the individual's care plan and report any changes promptly in accordance with local procedures.

Good Practice Reminder

If you notice a change in an individual's ability to eat or drink safely:

- Remain calm.
 - Follow your organisation's reporting procedures.
 - Share your observations with the appropriate senior member of staff.
 - Continue to follow the current care plan unless it is formally updated.
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What Should Care Staff Do?

Responding to Concerns Professionally

If you notice possible signs of swallowing difficulties, it is important to respond calmly, professionally and in accordance with your organisation's policies and procedures.

Care staff play an important role in recognising concerns and ensuring that observations are shared promptly with the appropriate members of the care team.

Good Practice

If you have concerns about an individual's ability to eat or drink safely:

- ✓ Follow the individual's current care plan.
 - ✓ Observe and record any relevant changes in accordance with local procedures.
 - ✓ Report your concerns promptly to the appropriate senior member of staff.
 - ✓ Continue to support the individual in line with agreed care plans until further guidance is provided.
 - ✓ Work as part of the wider multidisciplinary team to promote safe, person-centred care.
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Avoid Making Assumptions

It is important not to make changes to an individual's food texture, drink consistency or eating support without appropriate authorisation and documented guidance.

Changes should only be made following assessment and recommendations from suitably qualified healthcare professionals.

Remember

Recognising possible signs of dysphagia is the first step. Appropriate assessment, care planning and management should always be undertaken by the relevant healthcare professionals in line with local procedures.

Supporting Dignity and Respect

Every individual deserves to enjoy meals in a safe, comfortable and respectful environment.

By remaining observant, communicating effectively and following agreed care plans, care staff make an important contribution to promoting safe eating and drinking while maintaining dignity and independence wherever possible.

Good Practice Reminder

Observe • Report • Support

These three simple actions help ensure concerns are managed appropriately while promoting safe, compassionate and person-centred care.

Continue Your Learning

Recommended Training

Consider expanding your knowledge with courses including:

- ✓ Dementia Awareness
- ✓ Safeguarding Adults
- ✓ Infection Prevention & Control
- ✓ Health & Safety in Care
- ✓ End of Life Care Awareness
- ✓ Moving & Handling Awareness
- ✓ Nutrition & Hydration
- ✓ Food Safety & Hygiene Level 2
- ✓ HACCP Level 2
- ✓ Dysphagia Awareness & the IDDSI Framework

Explore More Free Resources

Visit the FlexiLearnHub Knowledge Hub for additional:

- Practical workplace checklists
- Awareness guides
- Professional advice sheets
- Training articles
- Downloadable resources

About FlexiLearnHub

FlexiLearnHub provides professional online learning, downloadable workplace resources and CPD-accredited training to support organisations and individuals working within the care, catering and hospitality sectors.

Our mission is to make professional learning accessible, practical and affordable while helping employers promote safer working practices, workplace compliance and continuous professional development.

Visit Us Online www.flexilearnhub.com

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