

Dysphagia



Communication and swallowing difficulties can have a negative impact on a person's confidence when he/she is socialising and participating in daily activities. The Speech Therapy department provides assessment, diagnosis, and therapy services for inpatients and outpatients with speech, language, voice and swallowing disorders.

What is dysphagia?

Dysphagia is a term used to describe a swallowing difficulty. It can be caused by stroke, progressive neurological diseases, e.g. dementia and Parkinson's disease, head and neck cancer, and respiratory diseases, e.g. chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Dysphagia can lead to aspiration. This is a term used to describe a situation when food and/or fluid enters the lungs. Aspiration can lead to a chest infection (pneumonia). Dysphagia can also cause dehydration, malnutrition, depression and deterioration in one's quality of life.

How can speech therapy help?

Speech Therapists are trained to assess the extent of dysphagia and to recommend strategies and/or treatments to help improve swallowing function.

A speech therapist will conduct an assessment that includes an examination of the oro-facial muscles (muscles needed for swallowing) and review a person's actual swallowing function. This will involve giving the person with dysphagia some food and drink.

After the initial assessment, the speech therapist will make recommendations to help the person manage his/her dysphagia. These may include:

- Diet/fluid modifications
- Exercises to improve function in swallowing muscles
- Compensatory strategies



In certain cases, the speech therapist may recommend an instrumental assessment, either a videofluoroscopy (to X-ray the swallow), or a fibre-optic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (to scope the swallow).

Safe feeding strategies

Ensure the following during and after feeding:

- The person is alert
- Minimise distractions (e.g. noise)
- Observe the person and feed the next spoonful only after you see him/her swallow
- Do not encourage the person to eat and talk at the same time
- Allow the person to rest if he/she appears short of breath
- Allow the person to remain seated 45 minutes after a meal
- Stop if the person appears tired

Point to note:

It is important to discontinue feeding completely if the person is coughing excessively during meals and alert your speech therapist.

Do not ignore dysphagia! With appropriate swallowing techniques, one can continue to enjoy oral feeding without affecting his/her pulmonary health.

It is important to look out for these symptoms in a person with dysphagia:

- Change in vocal quality: wet or gurgly-sounding
- Drooling
- Excessive coughing
- Excessive throat-clearing
- Extra effort or time needed to chew or swallow
- Pocketing of food in the mouth
- Shortness of breath during meals

Possible long-term effects of dysphagia:

- Dehydration
- Inability to enjoy eating and drinking as before
- Loss of weight
- Recurring chest infection (pneumonia)

If you are concerned that you, your family member or the person you care for has a swallowing difficulty, please seek medical attention immediately. Your doctor may refer you to a speech therapist.



For more information

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Jurong Community Hospital

1 Jurong East St 21, Singapore 609606

General enquiries: 6716 2000 Fax: 6716 5500

www.juronghealth.com.sg

Clinical and appointment line hours (closed on Sundays and public holidays)

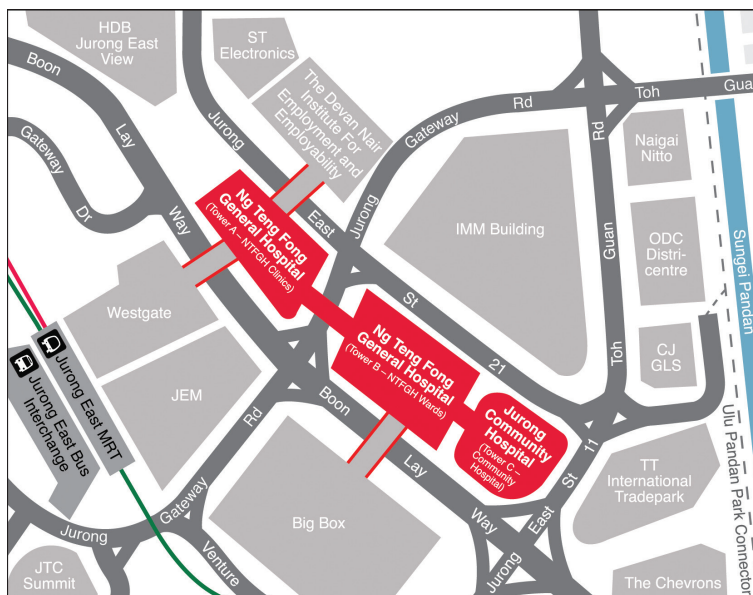
For appointments, please call 6716 2222

Monday - Friday 8.00am - 5.30pm, Saturday 8.00am - 12.30pm

For dental appointments, please call 6716 2233

Monday - Thursday 8.00am - 5.30pm, Friday 8.00am - 5.00pm

Getting there



By train

Jurong East MRT Station

By bus

From Jurong East Bus Interchange

SBS 51, 52, 66, 78, 79, 97, 97e, 98, 98M, 105, 143, 143M,
160, 183, 197, 333, 334, 335, 506

Along Boon Lay Way

SBS 99, Private bus service 625

Disclaimer:

The information in this brochure is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.