 Salisbury Speech & Language Therapy Tel: 01722 345571

**How to support frail elderly patients with elderly patients with eating and drinking**

**Does the patient have missing teeth or dentures affecting biting and chewing food?**

1. Look for sufficient upper & lower molar teeth or dentures for chewing. If missing try easier consistencies:-
2. Add moisture (sauce, gravy, custard) so chewing is easier
3. Easy to chew diet (IDDSI Level 7EC – see www.iddsi.org)
4. Avoid difficult textures, such as:
5. Hard, dry, crumbly, tough, fibrous and sticky foods
6. ‘Liquid and solids’ in the same mouthful. Instead liquidise e.g. minestrone soup into a cream/smooth soup or cereal with milk to porridge.
7. Look for upper & lower teeth or dentures for biting. If missing:
8. Ensure food is cut into small bite-sized pieces

**Does it take the person a long time to swallow or chew?**

1. Do they get breathless easily? Do they tire easily? Do they just forget to swallow? Are they drowsy? If so, consider:
2. Waiting longer between each mouthful
3. Trial having 6 small meals per day (rather than 3 larger meals)
4. Increase the taste of food
5. Use reminders/prompts to swallow: watch or feel the ‘adam’s apple’ lift during each swallow

**Is there drooling or very occasional coughing with drinks?** If so, try drinks that are naturally thicker than normal, such as:

1. Drinks made completely with full cream/milk (coffee, hot chocolate, Horlicks etc)
2. Smooth soups in a cup
3. Smoothies – bought or homemade
4. Milk shakes with full cream milk

**Is the patient’s body and head position poor for swallowing?** Lying down or a reclined position with a head tilted back can increase coughing and choking. Ensuring an upright sitting position with head tilted slightly forward will enable better swallowing.

**Discourage talking during swallowing –** to avoid the risk of inhaling food and drink!

**Mouth care –** thorough and frequent mouth care can reduce chest infections, because food left on teeth/dentures, or in saliva gives high levels of oral bacteria. When saliva trickles into the airway during sleep it can carry these bacteria into the lungs. Actions to reduce the risk of chest infection include:

1. Remove left-over food from inside the cheeks, on teeth, tongue or roof of mouth
2. Use a (soft) toothbrush to brush teeth, dentures and tongue
3. Complete these steps at the start of the day and following each meal
4. Ensure denture pots are cleaned regularly

**If you suspect ongoing swallow difficulties, refer to Speech and Language Therapy via your GP**