

Techniques to Help with Swallowing Difficulties

Swallowing difficulties can occur with Erdheim-Chester Disease, especially with those who are experiencing neurological issues. If you notice any difficulty swallowing, you should consult your doctor. (S)he will most likely order a swallow test that will allow experts to better understand the extent of the problem. If appropriate, speech therapy may be ordered to help you with techniques that will reduce the risk associated with swallowing difficulties.

Some swallowing problems that may be encountered include:

- Problems chewing
- Food sticking in the throat
- Sluggish movement and/or difficulty moving food back through the mouth
- Coughing and spluttering during and after eating
- Excessive saliva causing 'dribbling'
- Choking

In some cases, the following techniques might help reduce the level of swallowing difficulties. Many of these are similar to the "words of wisdom" we were given when we were children and were learning "table manners".

- Take smallish mouthfuls.
- Sit upright, with good posture, while eating.
- Chew each mouthful properly.
- Eat in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Eat slowly, allowing time between mouthfuls.
- Avoid talking while eating.
- If foodstuffs are dry, then add something moist, like gravy.
- Close your teeth together before you swallow. This has the effect of closing off your air-tube so things don't go down the wrong path into your lungs!
- Take a breath in and hold it once you have closed your teeth together. Then swallow, before you breathe out. This helps to close off, and protect, your windpipe even more.
- Tuck your chin toward your neck when you swallow to further protect your windpipe.
- If it feels that food 'gets stuck' in your throat, be sure to drink liquids to help keep the food moist.
- Change to a soft diet of puréed or liquidized food.
- Ensure your mouth is clear of all food at the end of a meal.
- Remain upright for at least 30 minutes following each meal.
- Thicken drinks by the addition of a corn starch-based preparation as advised by a dietician or speech therapist.