

## **DTAR Glossary of Swallowing Health Terms**

Helping to increase understanding of what professionals are saying and why it matters.

**Aspiration:** When food, drink, or stomach contents accidentally enter the airway or lungs instead of the esophagus. If no symptoms are noticeable, it is called Silent Aspiration.

- Can cause coughing, choking, or pneumonia and can happen without symptoms.

**Aspiration Pneumonia:** A lung infection caused by food, drink or other material entering the lungs and leading to inflammation and infection.

- A serious, sometimes life-threatening complication of dysphagia.

**Barium:** A safe, chalky liquid used during X-rays. In a swallow study, it is mixed with food or drink so healthcare professionals can see the swallowing process.

- It helps doctors and speech-language pathologists identify swallowing problems in real time. The barium is white in appearance when consuming, but shows up black on the image!

**Dehydration:** A condition that occurs when the body doesn't have enough fluids, which can cause serious health problems.

- Can lead to serious health problems such as confusion, infections, or hospitalizations.

**Dietitian:** A healthcare professional who ensures nutritional needs are met, especially when swallowing difficulties affect eating.

- They help prevent malnutrition and dehydration when diet changes are needed.

**Dysphagia:** Difficulty swallowing.

- Dysphagia can affect health, nutrition, hydration, and the quality of life of the person and their carepartner, and it can also carry broader impacts such as increased healthcare costs.

**Esophagus:** The food pipe, a muscular tube that carries food and drink from the throat down into the stomach.

- Problems here cause food or liquid to get “stuck” or come back up.

**FEES (Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing):** A swallowing test where a thin camera is passed through the nose to watch how food and liquid move through the throat.

- Typically done when the person is awake and the speech-language pathologist may provide numbing spray or gel in the nose for comfort; though it can also be done without! It shows if food or liquid is entering the airway during swallowing.

**IDDSI (International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative):** A global system that standardizes food and drink textures to ensure safe and consistent recommendations for swallowing.

- Ensures clear, consistent diet recommendations across healthcare settings.

**Malnutrition:** A condition that happens when the body doesn't get enough essential nutrients (calories, protein, vitamins) for good health.

- Increases the risk of illness, frailty, and poor recovery.

**Modified Diet:** Changes in food and drink textures that can make swallowing safer. Usually recommended by speech-language pathologists.

- Helps prevent choking and aspiration.

**Penetration:** When food, drink, or other stomach contents partially enter the airway but do not reach the lungs.

- It increases the risk of aspiration if not managed.

**Pharynx:** Also known as the throat. It connects the mouth to both the airway (windpipe) and the esophagus (food pipe).

- It is the passageway where food and air share a pathway.

**Reflux:** When stomach contents flow back up into the esophagus, sometimes reaching the throat.

- Can cause irritation and increase aspiration risk.

**Residue:** Food or liquid left in the mouth or throat after swallowing, which may increase the risk of choking or aspiration.

- Leftover material can slip into the airway and cause choking or aspiration.

**Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP):** A healthcare professional who helps people with speech, communication, and swallowing difficulties.

- They are the main specialists for swallowing evaluation and therapy.

**Swallow Screening:** A quick initial assessment to see if someone may be at risk for swallowing difficulties.

- A swallowing screening is performed to see if a full, comprehensive swallow assessment is needed. Early detection prevents complications like aspiration pneumonia.

**Thickener:** A powder or liquid added to drinks can make them thicker and easier to control in the mouth and swallow.

- Whether or not thickener is appropriate is determined by the Videofluoroscopic Swallow Study or FEES.

**Videofluoroscopic Swallow Study (VFSS):** An imaging test that uses x-ray video to show how food and drinks move from the mouth, through the throat, and into the esophagus.

- It uses a small amount of radiation and provides a clear picture of swallowing safety and efficiency.