

Difficulty Swallowing (Dysphagia)

What Is Dysphagia?

Dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing, is when food or liquids have trouble passing from your mouth to your stomach. It can happen occasionally, such as when eating too quickly, or it may be a sign of an underlying medical issue if it occurs regularly. At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and managing dysphagia, providing personalised care to help improve your symptoms and quality of life.

What Causes Dysphagia?

Dysphagia can be caused by problems in the mouth, throat, or oesophagus (food pipe). Common causes include:

- **Oesophageal strictures:** Narrowing of the oesophagus, often caused by acid reflux or gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD).
- **Oesophageal cancer:** Tumours that block the passage of food.
- **Achalasia:** A condition where the muscles of the oesophagus and lower oesophageal sphincter (LOS) do not work properly.
- **Neurological disorders:** Stroke, Parkinson's disease, or multiple sclerosis affecting the muscles used for swallowing.
- **Hiatus hernia:** When part of the stomach pushes into the chest, causing swallowing difficulties.
- **Infections or inflammation:** Oesophagitis caused by acid reflux or infections can make swallowing painful.

What Are The Symptoms Of Dysphagia?

Symptoms of dysphagia can vary depending on the cause but may include:

- Feeling like food is stuck in your throat or chest
- Pain or discomfort when swallowing
- Coughing or choking when eating or drinking
- Regurgitation of food or stomach acid
- Unexplained weight loss
- Frequent chest infections due to food or liquid entering the airways

If you have persistent swallowing difficulties, it's important to seek medical advice, as it may indicate a more serious underlying condition.

When To Seek Urgent Help

Seek immediate medical attention if you experience:

- Severe swallowing difficulties that prevent you from eating or drinking
- Vomiting blood or dark material that resembles coffee grounds
- Sudden, unexplained weight loss

- Chest pain or pressure when swallowing

How Is Dysphagia Diagnosed?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to determine the cause of dysphagia. These may include:

- **Endoscopy:** A flexible tube with a camera is used to examine your oesophagus for blockages, strictures, or inflammation.
- **Barium swallow X-ray:** You drink a contrast liquid, and X-rays are taken to observe the swallowing process.
- **Oesophageal manometry:** This measures the pressure and movement of the muscles in your oesophagus.
- **Oesophageal pH monitoring:** To assess the presence and severity of acid reflux.

How Is Dysphagia Treated?

The treatment for dysphagia depends on its underlying cause and may include:

- **Oesophageal dilatation:** A balloon or specialised tool is used to gently widen the oesophagus during an endoscopy if narrowing is present.
- **Medication:** Acid reflux or inflammation may be managed with proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), antacids, or other medications.
- **Dietary changes:** Switching to soft or pureed foods and thickened liquids can help while undergoing treatment.
- **Speech and language therapy:** For neurological-related swallowing difficulties, therapy can improve swallowing techniques.
- **Surgery:** In cases of achalasia or oesophageal cancer, surgical treatment may be necessary.

Can Dysphagia Be Prevented?

While not all cases of dysphagia can be prevented, the following steps can reduce your risk:

- Manage acid reflux with lifestyle changes and medications
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption
- Eat slowly and chew food thoroughly
- Maintain a healthy weight to minimise pressure on your digestive system

Why Choose Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we are experts in diagnosing and treating dysphagia and other digestive conditions. Our team of experienced specialists uses state-of-the-art equipment and a patient-centred approach to provide the highest standard of care. We work closely with you to develop a personalised treatment plan tailored to your needs.

Contact Us

If you're having trouble swallowing or have concerns about your digestive health, contact Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can make a significant difference in managing dysphagia and improving your quality of life.