

Dysphagia

Mechanism: Division into **oropharyngeal** (difficulty initiating the swallow, most common form in adults and children, muscular - tongue, pharynx) and **esophageal** (obstructive/motility - bolus passage through the chest). The cause is neural (cranial nerves IX, X, and XII coordinate the swallowing reflex, the brainstem integrates the individual phases of swallowing), muscular, structural, and inflammatory - edema and fibrosis.

Syndromes:

Bulbar syndrome - impairment of cranial nerves IX, X, XII.

Myasthenia gravis - causes fatigue of the swallowing muscles.

Parkinson disease - often manifests as slowed and inefficient swallowing.

Red flags:

Acute dysphagia - stroke in the vertebrobasilar territory (risk of aspiration; risk of cachexia !!).

A swallowing disorder accompanied by generalized muscle weakness may indicate a neuromuscular disease.

A neurogenic cause is the most common in seniors (60% of patients in long-term care facilities).

Consider dysphagia with aspiration in cases of recurrent pneumonias and when swallowing is accompanied by coughing.

Examination:

- First, determine localization (oropharyngeal: coughing, choking, nasal regurgitation, dysarthria vs. esophageal: feeling of bolus hold-up a moment after swallowing).
- ENT examination.
- Examine the gag reflex, soft palate reflex, and signs of tongue and soft palate paresis.
- Endoscopy (FEES/bronchoscopy), videofluoroscopic study when aspiration is suspected.
- Brain CT when a stroke is suspected.
- EMG when a neuromuscular disease is suspected.

Treatment: Directed at the cause:

- **Oropharyngeal/neurogenic** - speech-language pathology therapy, diet-texture modification, compensatory maneuvers, treatment of the underlying disease, enteral feeding if the aspiration risk is high.

Onset	Children	Adults
Acute	foreign body, tonsillitis, caustic ingestion	stroke, foreign body, botulism
Subacute	eosinophilic esophagitis, GBS variant	myasthenia, GBS, brainstem lesion, esophagitis
Chronic	neuromuscular, structural	ALS, Parkinson disease, stricture, achalasia, carcinoma

Explanatory notes: Stroke - cerebrovascular accident, GBS - Guillain-Barré syndrome, ALS - amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.