**Good eating and drinking standards**

**Top tips to support safer eating and drinking**

**What do we mean by ‘safer’ eating and drinking?**

* **Preventing choking and chest infections**: some people have an increased risk of choking due to physical difficulties with chewing, or because they regularly eat too much too quickly. Sometimes it is due to a combination of these. Some people are at greater risk of food or drink going down the wrong way onto their lungs, due to physical difficulties with swallowing.
* **Eating and drinking enough**: we need to be able to eat and drink enough to keep or bodies healthy and well, and to have energy to do things.
* **Enjoying eating and drinking**: food and drink give us pleasure; we try out new tastes; we connect with people through mealtimes, drinks and celebrations. People with swallowing difficulties may be anxious or distressed at mealtimes; they may feel excluded or unable to eat and drink with others.

**There are lots of things you can do to help make eating and drinking safer and more pleasurable.**

**The following are general guidelines. However, if you are worried; or if the person you care for has had a choking incident or chest infections; or if you feel their swallowing has changed and it is more difficult, please seek advice.**

**Speech & Language Therapist**: difficulties with swallowing

**Physiotherapist**: posture and respiratory health

**Occupational Therapist**: seating and equipment; preparing food

**Learning Disability Nurse**: help with accessing healthcare

**You can contact all the Learning Disability Team Services by:**

* **Telephone: 0300 123 4195 (Monday to Friday)**
* **Email:** [**kentchft.ldsref@nhs.net**](mailto:kentchft.ldsref@nhs.net)

**GP or Pharmacist**: advice on medication

**Dentist**: help with your dental and mouth care

**Dietitian**: help with eating healthily

**Top tips for how you can help!**

**How is the person today?**

* How is the person today? Are they unwell or tired? If this is not a ‘good day’, do you need to change anything? They may need more help.
* You may need to think about the best time to support the person you care for to eat and drink. It may not always be a usual mealtime. Some people cope better with smaller meals more often throughout the day. You can have a rest between courses.

**How much help does the person need?**

* Is the person able to eat independently or do they need help?
* How much help do they need? Do they need help to load their cutlery; or support to bring cutlery to their mouth? Or do they need your full support? If they do, they are at much greater risk so we need to use a lot of skill to help people safely.

**How is the person sitting?**

* The safest position for eating and drinking is to be upright, with feet supported and head in a neutral and midline position.
* Sitting at the table helps. Avoid eating and drinking lying on the sofa or in bed.
* If the person you care for is finding it difficult to sit in a safe position for meals, a Physiotherapist or an Occupational Therapist can help

**Where are they eating?**

* If the person needs to take care when eating and drinking, it might help to try to reduce distractions around them, for example, turn off TV or radio; choose a quieter place to eat
* It might help to avoid talking when eating/drinking.
* Try to avoid time pressures at mealtimes so that they can eat at a slower and more comfortable pace.

**Equipment to help you**

* Choose cutlery that they can hold easily. If this is difficult there are many types of adapted cutlery that can help. A smaller spoon/fork might help them to slow down. An Occupational Therapist can help you find the right equipment.
* A non-slip mat can help the person manage their plate/bowl. Some plates have higher sides to make it easier to load cutlery. Some bowls help keep your food warm.
* An open cup will help keep safer head position.

**Mouth care**

* Look after their mouth. A clean mouth helps keep your whole body healthy.
* Brush teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
* See ‘Healthy Mouth Safer Swallow’ leaflet for more help.
* If you think their teeth or mouth may be painful, please ask a dentist for advice.
* If they have dentures, make sure they fit well. Ask the dentist for help if they are loose or painful.

**Eating:**

* Take small bites of food. If it’s difficult to bite, try cutting food up into smaller pieces.
* Don’t rush. It is important to chew your food properly. Pause between mouthfuls, making sure you have swallowed everything in your mouth before taking the next mouthful. You can try a swallow without food to help, or maybe a sip of your drink.
* If you are getting tired, it might help to take little rests, or have smaller meals more often
* If you find certain types of food are more difficult, please ask your Speech & Language Therapist for advice. You might find that softer food that is moist and even in texture is easier.

**Drinking**

* Use a short open cup or beaker, so that you don’t have to tip your head backwards. A straw or a beaker with a pop-up spout may work best for you.
* Try to sip your drink, avoid large gulps.
* Take your time.
* If you are finding drinks difficult. If you feel you can’t control them, or they make you cough, please ask a Speech & Language Therapist for advice.

**Medication:**

* Are they taking tablets or medicine? If they are finding them difficult to swallow, please ask the person who prescribed them for advice.

**Communication**

* How does the person communicate key important messages to you at mealtimes? How do they communicate whether they like something or not? If they want more or have had enough? If they want you to slow down?
* Try to share what you know about the person’s communication with others who may help at mealtimes too. You could use a communication passport or a specific communication tool for mealtimes.