

Swallowing Difficulties



Réseau de
cancérologie
Rossy

Rossy
Cancer
Network

Symptom Management Tip Sheet



Let's talk about swallowing difficulties...

- You may hear your healthcare team refer to swallowing difficulties as dysphagia.
- Dysphagia is difficulty swallowing food or liquid. Head and neck cancer or its treatment can make it more difficult for you to eat or drink.
- Signs of dysphagia include: coughing or choking when eating or drinking; more effort or time required for meals; bringing food back up to the mouth or nose; or a sensation that food is stuck in your mouth or throat.
- You may also experience pain in your mouth, throat, and/or nose; dryness in your mouth and/or throat, and changes in taste. These changes may limit what you eat and drink. Your healthcare team can help with pain management.



What you can do

- Swallowing management will depend on your specific situation, and the solutions are different for each patient.
- You might need to change to foods or liquids with different textures.
- Your healthcare team may suggest specific exercises or strategies to help you swallow.
- You may be followed by a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) and a Dietician (RD) throughout your treatment for swallowing and nutritional advice. If you experience any changes in your swallowing or signs of dysphagia, please contact your healthcare team right away.
- If painful swallowing is the **only** symptom you experience, please ask your healthcare team about which pain management solutions are available.

Other resources

Canadian Cancer Society
<https://cancer.ca/en/treatments/side-effects/swallowing-problems>

More resources at
mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn/patient

Who can help



Nurse Navigator (IPO)

If you have one, please speak with your IPO

If you are getting treatment at:

- **Oncology Clinic, call:**
Symptom Management Hotline
514-340-8222 ext. 25529
Mon – Fri. 8h00-16h00
- **Radiation Oncology Clinic, call:**
514-340-8222 ext. 24124

This information should not be considered as medical advice. It is not to be used in place of a visit with a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional. If you have questions about your individual medical situation, please consult with your healthcare professional.