

# Swallowing Problems (Oromotor Dysphagia)



## What is Oromotor Dysphagia (OMD)?

Dysphagia means difficulty swallowing. Oromotor dysphagia (OMD) is caused by nerve problems and muscle weakness affecting chewing and swallowing. OMD may negatively affect a person's quality of life by making meals unpleasant, and causing dehydration, malnutrition, and aspiration pneumonia.

## Who is affected?

OMD affects up to 30% of seniors living in the community and 50% of people living in nursing homes. OMD is a complication of neurological conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, dementia, chronic heart and lung disease, dental problems, or reduced saliva. It can also be caused by acute illness, general weakness, and frailty.

## What are the symptoms of OMD?

- Difficulty initiating swallowing.
- Taking a long time to finish meals.
- Coughing or choking during or after eating.
- Feeling of food getting stuck in the throat or chest.
- Gurgling or wet-sounding voice during or after eating.
- Excessive saliva, drool, or mucus in the mouth and throat.
- Regurgitation of food or liquids.
- Recurrent pneumonia.
- Unexplained weight loss.



## Treatment Options

Treatment for OMD depends on the underlying cause. Treatment may include speech therapy, consultation with a dietician, physical therapy, and/or using medications to treat the underlying cause(s), like Parkinson's disease.

Managing OMD requires dietary modifications to ensure that you can eat safely and comfortably.

## Choking Crises

Learn how to do the Heimlich Maneuver in case someone chokes on something solid.

1. If the person is unable to speak, something is likely occluding the airway.
2. Bend the person over at the waist to face the ground.
3. Strike five times between the person's shoulder blades with the heel of your hand.
4. Then, stand behind the person and wrap your arms around their waist.
5. Make a fist with one hand and place it just above the person's belly button.
6. Grasp your fist with your other hand and pull inward and upward with a quick, forceful motion.
7. Repeat the thrusts until the obstruction is cleared.
8. Call 911 if the food is not quickly dislodged.

