

## Safe Swallowing practice note

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## Care and support for people with an unsafe swallow

### Care homes for adults and older people should have the following in place

- Staff are trained and knowledgeable about what to do in an emergency.
- Staff are trained and knowledgeable about when and where people with complex swallowing difficulties should be referred to a GP and specialist speech and language services.
- Staff are confident in the management of a choking person and resuscitation methods. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) advise that all staff have a minimum of level 2 dysphagia training.
- Communication across staff teams, including agency staff, ensures all staff know how best to support the person with eating and drinking.
- Personal plans reflect in detail people's needs, wishes and preferences in order to support a safe swallow, manage risk and make sure they can enjoy their eating and drinking. Our [guide to personal planning](#) offers useful advice and information.
- There are clear records of the discussion with the person and their carer or POA around their risks and preferences for eating and drinking.

### Good practice for safe swallowing links to the [quality framework for care homes for adults and older people](#)

1.3. People's health and wellbeing benefits from their care and support

5.1. Assessment and personal planning reflect people's outcomes and wishes

#### Core assurances we look for at every inspection:

- The personal plan is based on an ongoing comprehensive assessment of individual's needs, strengths, risk and is outcomes-focussed. It is implemented, evaluated and reviewed, reflects the person's changing needs and outlines the support required to maximise their quality of life in accordance with their wishes.
- People are actively involved in their personal planning process and care is observed to be person centred and delivered in accordance with each person's individual plan.
- Personal plans are accessible to people and the staff providing their care and support, ensuring their needs and wishes are met.

#### Staff training

We expect care staff working directly with people who have swallowing problems to achieve a minimum of Level 2 of the [Eating, Drinking and Swallowing Competency Framework](#) provided by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

#### Resources

We have published guidance on [supporting people with eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties](#).

NHS Lothian and NHS Lanarkshire offer two excellent guides that have been widely adopted by many health boards across Scotland. [Manual for Mealtimes](#) and [Swallowing Matters](#) give information on how to identify and support residents with eating and drinking difficulties and when to refer to speech and language therapy.

A short but informative case-study video by the [Unsafe Swallow Project](#) tells the real-life experience of Michael Ludham, who had swallowing difficulties and inspired the project, which was supported by the Queens Nursing Institute.

### **Information about resuscitation guidelines**

When a person is suddenly unable to speak or talk, particularly if eating, take the following actions.

- Encourage the person to cough.
- If the cough becomes ineffective, give up to five back blows: Lean the person forward.
  - Apply blows between the shoulder blades using the heel of one hand.
- If back blows are ineffective, give up to five abdominal thrusts.
  - Stand behind the person and put both your arms around the upper part of their abdomen.
  - Lean the person forwards. Clench your fist and place it between the umbilicus (navel/belly button) and the bottom of the ribcage. Grasp your fist with the other hand and pull sharply inwards and upwards.
- If choking has not been relieved after five abdominal thrusts, continue alternating five back blows with five abdominal thrusts until the choking is relieved, or the person becomes unresponsive.
- If the person becomes unresponsive, start CPR and call an ambulance.

The Resuscitation Council UK offers [a range of resources on choking](#) and has produced this [handy flow-chart](#) to show the steps 'at a glance'.

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