

# 10 Things to Know

# Swallowing Changes with ALS



## 1 **Swallowing**

A safe swallow requires 26 pairs of muscles to work properly. The muscles in the mouth and throat area are called bulbar muscles.



## 2 **Changes in swallowing**

With weakened bulbar muscles, your ability to swallow safely may be impacted. The medical term for a swallowing disorder is *dysphagia* (*dis-fay-ja*).



## 3 **Swallowing assessments**

Tests can be done to evaluate your ability to swallow food and liquids safely. A Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) is the specialist who conducts the assessments.



## 4 **Thickened liquids**

Thicker liquids move more slowly when you swallow, giving your muscles more time to close the airway and require less effort to control. If your SLP suggests thickened liquids, they will suggest products you can add to make any liquid thicker.



## 5 **Easy to eat foods**

Your SLP may recommend soft food and suggest adding sauces and gravies to make swallowing easier. This can help increase your calories while reducing the effort it takes to eat.



## 6 **Safe swallowing strategies**

Your SLP can determine if strategies such as eating slowly, thickening your liquids, or tucking your chin to your chest might improve your ability to swallow.



## 7 **Report red flags**

If you experience coughing while eating or drinking, have trouble chewing or swallowing, or have trouble keeping food and liquid in your mouth, report this to your ALS care team. These symptoms may suggest unsafe swallowing.



## 8 **Risks of unsafe swallowing**

Weakening bulbar muscles can make chewing and swallowing more tiring, increasing your risk for weight loss. It can also lead to food or drink entering your airway leading to lung infections such as aspiration pneumonia.



## 9 **Supplementing nutrition**

If it is too difficult to maintain good nutrition and hydration through eating and drinking, a feeding tube can be placed to supplement oral nutrition and hydration.



## 10 **Knowledge is power**

Communicate with your ALS multidisciplinary team to learn strategies and options for nutrition and hydration now and going forward.