Feeding and swallowing difficulties are called dysphagia (dis-FAY-juh).

**Dysphagia is more common than you think.**
- As many as 60% of people living in long-term care have a swallowing disorder.
- As many as 45% of typically developing children have feeding or swallowing problems (SAC, n.d.).

**Dysphagia may occur with:**
- disease or injury involving the brain or nervous system (e.g., stroke, spinal cord injury, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease);
- delayed or disordered development (e.g., cerebral palsy, autism); and
- structural or mechanical changes to the face, jaw, mouth, tongue and/or neck (e.g., related to cancer, surgery, aging).

**Problems may include difficulty with feeding, eating, drinking or taking medications such as:**
- frequent choking, coughing or gagging
- pocketing of food in the mouth after swallows
- trouble chewing
- effortful or painful swallowing
- food or liquid spilling from the mouth or nose; drooling
- feeling as though food is stuck in the throat
- regurgitation or vomiting
- gurgling voice after swallowing
- congested chest, lots of phlegm, recurring chest infections
- unintentional weight loss or poor weight gain
- poor food and liquid intake
- failure to progress diet textures (e.g., from pureed to more solid food consistencies)
- difficulty accepting or tolerating food
- lack of enjoyment in eating

**Risks associated with swallowing problems include:**
- food or liquid entering the lungs (aspiration)
- blockage of the airway (obstruction or choking)
- malnutrition
- dehydration
- chest infections, development of chronic lung conditions and/or aspiration pneumonia
- impaired growth
- impaired development
- patient, family and/or caregiver stress
- social difficulties or isolation
Assessment and Treatment
Assessments may be conducted by an interdisciplinary assessment team which may include a(n):

- Registered Speech-language Pathologist;
- Registered Occupational Therapist; and/or
- Registered Dietitian.

Team members work closely with physicians, nurses, psychologists and social workers. Referrals are made to medical specialists as needed.

Assessment teams typically do the following:

- Assess the difficulty with feeding and swallowing; and
- provide counseling, education, treatment recommendations and follow up to:
  - maximize safety and adequacy of nutrition and hydration
  - promote independence and/or improved self-feeding.

Information Gathered From:
Speech Language Pathology and Audiology Canada (SAC). (n.d.) Dysphagia.