

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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