

## Swallowing Screening Test after a Stroke: Information for Patients and Families

### Stroke and Swallowing

A stroke can affect the muscles used for swallowing food or liquid. This may include the muscles of the lips, tongue, and throat, leading to difficulty swallowing.

Difficulty swallowing (known as dysphagia) is common after a stroke. Up to 65% of stroke survivors have some form of difficulty swallowing.

### Why is it important to have my swallowing tested?

A swallowing screening test can help to identify if you are likely to have difficulty swallowing.

Difficulty swallowing can lead to complications such as malnutrition, dehydration, and an increased risk of food or liquid going down the wrong way (aspiration). These complications can result in pneumonia (a lung infection), with a prolonged stay in hospital, or death.

Detecting difficulty swallowing early improves patients' recovery and helps to ensure the best outcome for each patient.

### How do I prepare for the swallowing screening test?

Do not try to swallow anything, including water, food or medications until you have completed your swallowing screening test. Families can help by not bringing in any food or drink until your health care team advises that it is okay. Your screener will provide any additional instructions.

### What happens during a swallowing screening test?

During the swallowing screening test, the screener will examine the muscles of your face, mouth, and throat. He or she may also give you a small amount of water to drink. Throughout the swallowing screening test, the screener will ask you to follow a series of simple instructions. It is important to follow the instructions closely. If you have any questions, please ask the screener.

### What happens after a swallowing screening test?

If you pass the swallowing screening test, you can eat and drink. However, we will watch your progress for your safety and comfort.

If you fail the swallowing screening test, you will see a Speech-Language Pathologist for a "clinical swallowing evaluation". Please do not try to swallow anything, including water, food or medications (unless your doctor instructs otherwise) until after you complete this evaluation.

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Developed by:

- **Central LHIN Dysphagia Screening Working Group** in collaboration with the following organizations: Central LHIN, Central East Stroke Network, Humber River Hospital, Mackenzie Health, Markham Stouffville Hospital, North York General Hospital, Southlake Regional Health Centre, Stevenson Memorial Hospital
- **Adapted from "Central East Stroke Network Swallowing Screening Test for Patients After Stroke" brochure.**

Revised: March 1, 2017