

**Children's Speech and Language Therapy
Supporting Children with Cerebral Palsy
Eating, Drinking and Swallowing Information**

Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) work with children and young people with cerebral palsy to:

- Assess and manage eating, drinking, and swallowing (EDS) difficulties.
- Work closely with families, schools, other setting and professionals to ensure young people can eat, drink, swallow and experience food safely for their skills

Eating, Drinking and Swallowing (EDS)

Children and young people with cerebral palsy are more likely to have some form of eating, drinking or swallowing problem. This is known as dysphagia. Difficulties could be with:

- Being able to bite, chew and break down foods – particularly those which are a more difficult texture
- Controlling liquids and foods to manage them safely
- Swallowing foods or drinks – children and young people are at an increased risk of aspiration (food or drink going down the wrong way)

Some children and young people with cerebral palsy need to have feeding and nutrition in a different way if they are not able to safely manage the food and drink they need to grow and be well. This is sometimes called PEG or button feeding. Speech and language therapists can carry out assessment of eating, drinking and swallowing if problems are suspected. Signs of difficulty can include:

- Coughing, choking or gagging during meals
- Changes to breathing pattern when eating and drinking
- Changes in colour when eating and drinking
- Recurrent chest infections
- Meals taking more time or being stressful for the young person or families/carers.

What support for eating, drinking and swallowing looks like

Our team provide assessment of eating, drinking and swallowing to support the safety, efficiency and enjoyment of eating and drinking. This will include:

- Taking a case history – we will ask about mealtimes, what is going well and what is more challenging. We will ask about medical history including chest infections
- Watching children at a mealtime – we may see them in person or ask for videos. This helps us to assess the child's eating, drinking and swallowing skills.

Telephone: 01226 644331 (answer machine available)

Email: barnsley.speechtherapy@swyt.nhs.uk

Website: www.barnsleyspeechtherapy.co.uk

Facebook: @Barnsley Specialist Children's health

Twitter: @BarnsleySCH

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/Barnsleyspeechandlanguagetherapy>



With all of us in mind.

- Talking to other professionals that know the child – like doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and school staff. This helps us to work together to provide individualised advice.
- Writing an eating and drinking care plan – this may suggest what foods and drink children can safely manage and some which they should not have. It may advise on specialist equipment they need and how they should be sat.

Sometimes we may not be sure about the safety of a child's swallow. We may need to refer for an xray, called a videofluoroscopy. This is done at Sheffield Children's Hospital. A referral needs to be made by a doctor.

Your journey with us

We will

- provide an eating and drinking care plan to promote safety and enjoyable mealtime experiences. We involve young people, families and professionals to do this, talking to them about our assessment.
- Give training to key people support the young person at mealtimes.
- Support young people to understand what their care plan means and what they need to know about their eating, drinking or swallowing
- Discharge children and young people when up to date advice is in place.
- Give clear information about when to get in touch with us, if eating, drinking or swallowing skills change.

We know that eating, drinking and swallowing skills can change over time. Some young people with cerebral palsy will be seen by our service several times between the ages of 0-18. Some young people will need to be seen by therapists when they become adults.

How to refer to our service

A referral to our service for eating, drinking and swallowing needs to be made by a medical professional such as a GP, Paediatrician or Consultant, health visitor or physiotherapist.

We ask for referrals from medical professionals so that plans can be put in place to keep children healthy and well while they wait to see a speech and language therapist.

For children attending Greenacre special school – we will accept referrals from members of the senior leadership team.

Our referral form can be accessed via our website:

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Preparation for adulthood and transition to adult services

Our service can help support children and young people with preparing for adulthood by:

- Giving general information about preparation for adulthood and services available. Information about this can be found on our website: [supporting older children](#)
- Reviewing communication needs, including AAC
- Reviewing eating, drinking and swallowing needs
- Supporting independence and self advocacy
- Liaising with adult services if ongoing support is required

Further helpful information

[Cerebral Palsy in under 25s](#) – assessment and management (NICE guidelines)

[Barnsley Local Offer website](#)

[IDDSI.org](#) – the recommendations used in eating and drinking care plans to describe food and drink textures and consistency

[Feeding Matters](#) – an American website with helpful information to support young people with paediatric feeding disorders

[Scope](#) – the cerebral palsy charity

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