

# SBH SCHOOL TIPS



## SAFE MEALTIMES AT SCHOOL

Eating and drinking are something that we all do several times a day. Easy and automatic- right? WRONG. Eating and swallowing is a complex process that requires the use of a complex combination and harmony of muscles. Many of us do this without thinking, however a number of children have significant swallowing difficulties that need to be managed while they are at school everyday. Swallowing difficulties are important and serious as they can cause death by choking, aspiration or pneumonia. Eating and drinking safely is important for our health and quality of life.

Some children with disabilities experience difficulties with swallowing from an early age. And some children can develop these as they transition through childhood. It is fundamentally important that any child who needs supported mealtimes and supervised mealtimes is able to have these within the educational setting. These mealtimes need to be safe, and allow children to enjoy mealtimes as much as possible with their peers.

## Mealtime Support Plans

- Always ensure that a child who requires one has a mealtime support plan in place and that this has been updated regularly by a Speech Pathologist. Ensure that it is visible and any staff who support at mealtimes are aware of each child's individual plan. Food and drinks always need to be provided in line with this support plan.

## Other Mealtime Tips:

- Positioning – ensure the child is in the recommended position for all meals and drinks – this is usually as close to 90 degrees upright as possible, with support for their back and feet.
- Always ensure the child is awake and alert at mealtimes.
- Reduce environmental distractions wherever possible.
- Always explain what you are doing to the child, if you are feeding use verbal and visual cues as appropriate.
- Provide a comfortable and relaxed mealtime environment, where possible.
- Be aware that things can change quickly and constantly monitor for any changes in a child.



## Signs of Swallowing Difficulties:

- Choking
- Unexplained or recurrent chest infections
- Coughing during or after meals
- Unclear speech during or after meals
- Difficulty with specific foods
- Difficulties with swallowing medications
- Difficulty with food staying in the mouth or clearing the mouth after eating
- Food coming out nose
- Slow eating – mealtimes lasting more than 20 minutes
- Wet or gurgling voice
- Flushed cheeks, watery eyes, flared nostrils.
- Multiple swallows per mouthful
- Gagging and/or vomiting
- Frequent throat clearing

## Picky Eaters or something more – here are some 'Red Flags' for mealtimes:

- Missing whole food groups
- Excessive gagging during mealtimes
- Mealtimes/fussiness is getting worse over time
- Distress at mealtimes
- Suspicious chest health

## When to refer to the Speech Pathologist?

- If you notice any changes in a child at mealtimes.
- If you notice coughing, nasal flaring or going red in the face, choking or gagging during mealtimes.
- If you notice a change in respiration rate or think 'gosh that's a struggle' during a mealtime.
- If you are unsure about the current mealtime plan and recommendations.