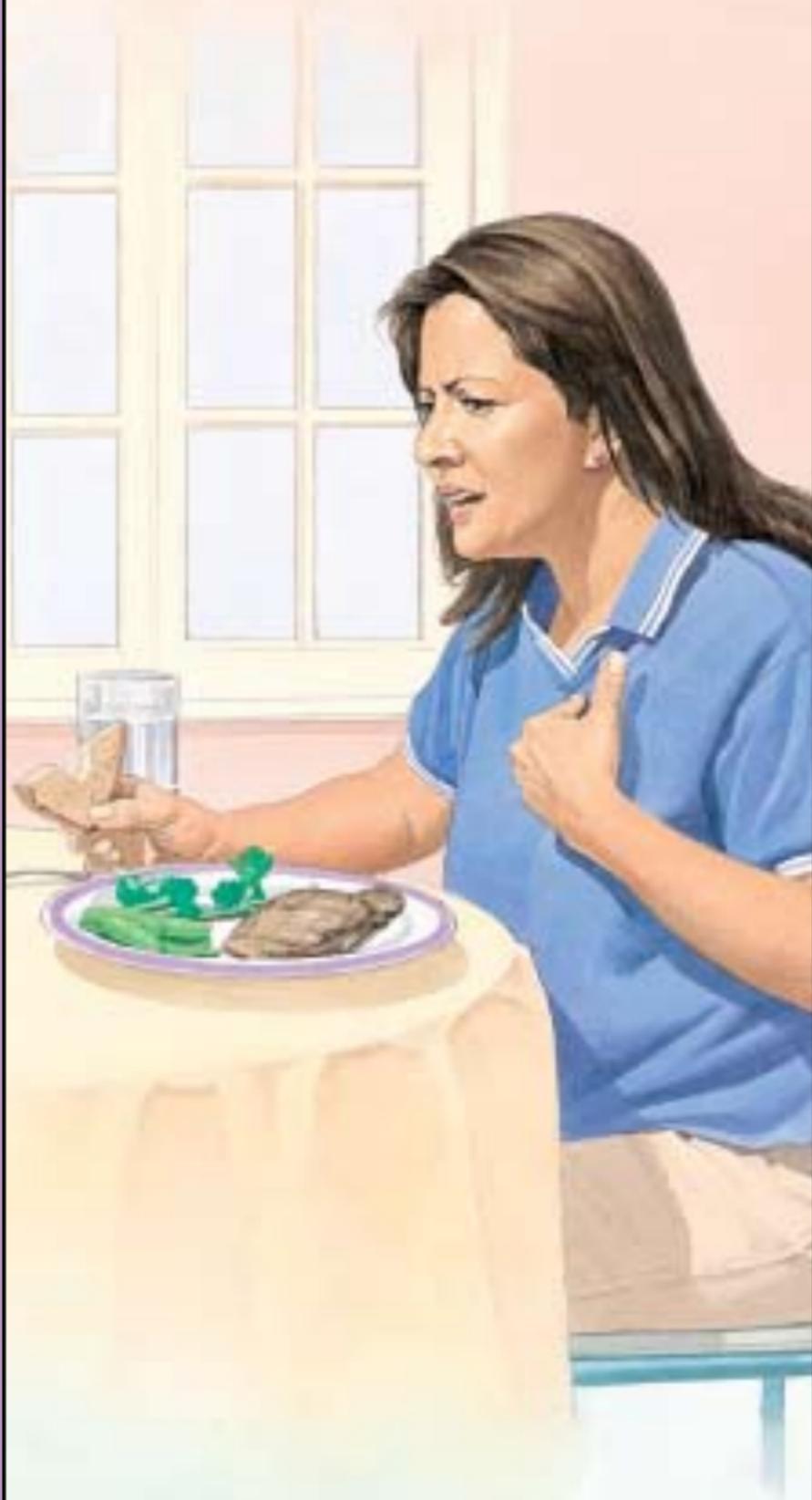


# Dysphagia

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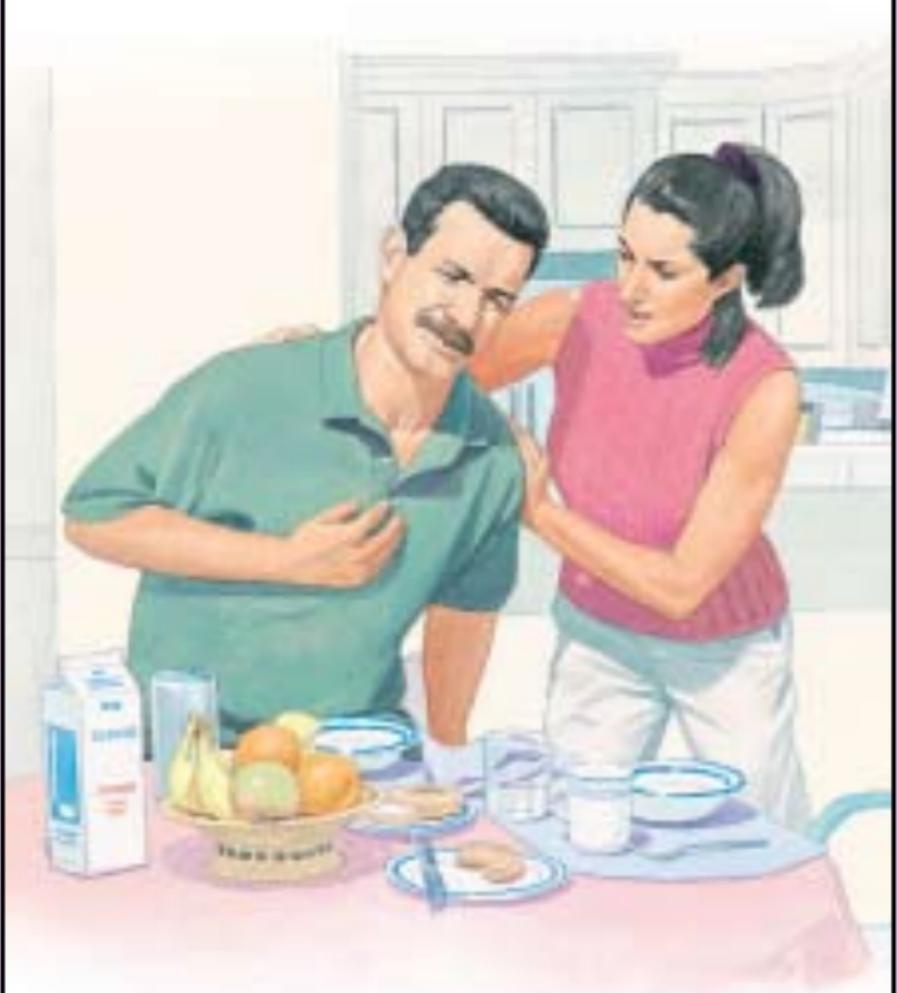
**A Problem Swallowing  
Foods or Liquids**



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PATIENT EDUCATION

# What Is Dysphagia?

If you have a problem swallowing foods or liquids, you may have **dysphagia**. It has a number of causes. Your doctor can find out what is causing your problem and help relieve your symptoms.



## Common Symptoms

If you have dysphagia, you may:

- Feel chest pressure or pain when you swallow
- Choke or cough when swallowing
- Vomit after eating or drinking
- Aspirate (inhale into the lungs) foods or liquids when you swallow
- Have fatigue and weight loss

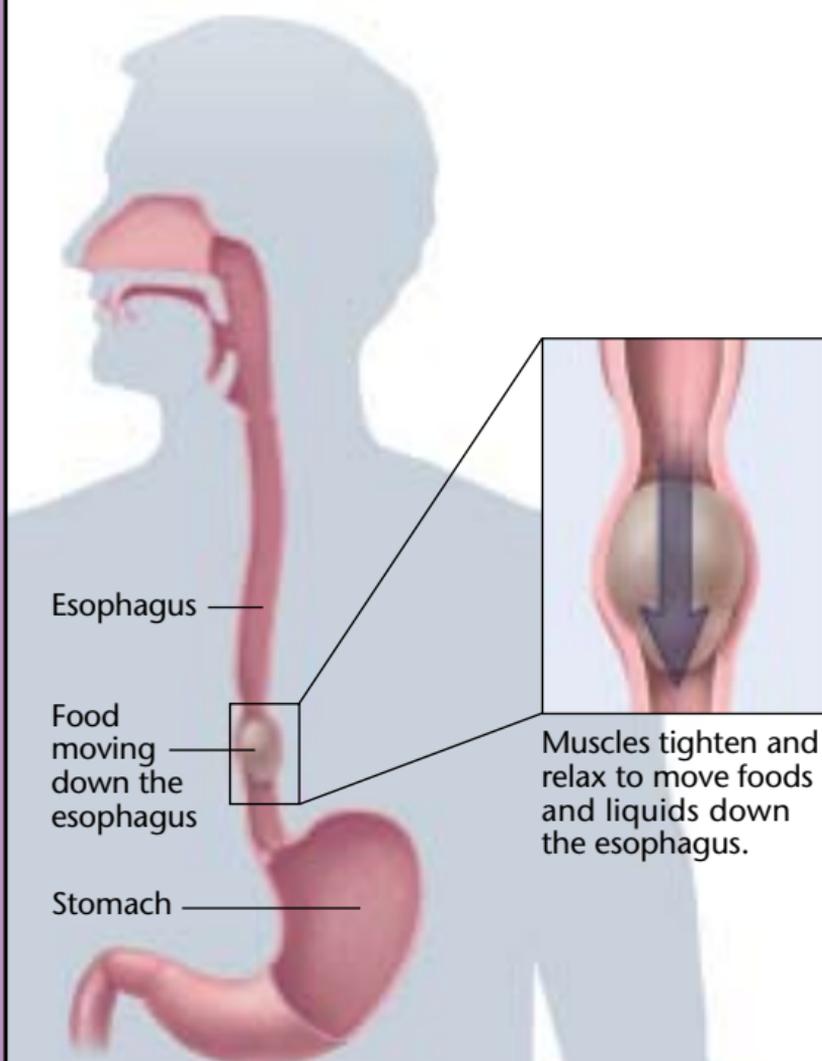
## Causes of Dysphagia

Dysphagia can be caused by any of the following:

- A problem in the esophagus, such as an ulcer, a stricture, or cancer
- Muscles in your mouth, throat, or esophagus that don't work right
- A nerve problem or a brain disorder that leaves your throat muscles weak

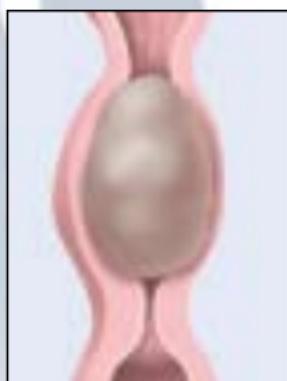
# When You Swallow

Your tongue pushes foods or liquids from your mouth to your throat as you eat or drink and swallow. They then pass down the **esophagus** (a muscular tube) into the stomach. To keep foods or liquids moving, the esophagus muscles tighten and relax in wavelike motions.



## When You Have Dysphagia

With dysphagia, foods or liquids do not easily pass down the esophagus. Often, dysphagia occurs if the esophagus walls thicken, causing a narrowing (**stricture**) of the passage.



# Your Evaluation

A medical evaluation helps your doctor pinpoint the cause of your dysphagia. Your evaluation may include a health history and some special tests.

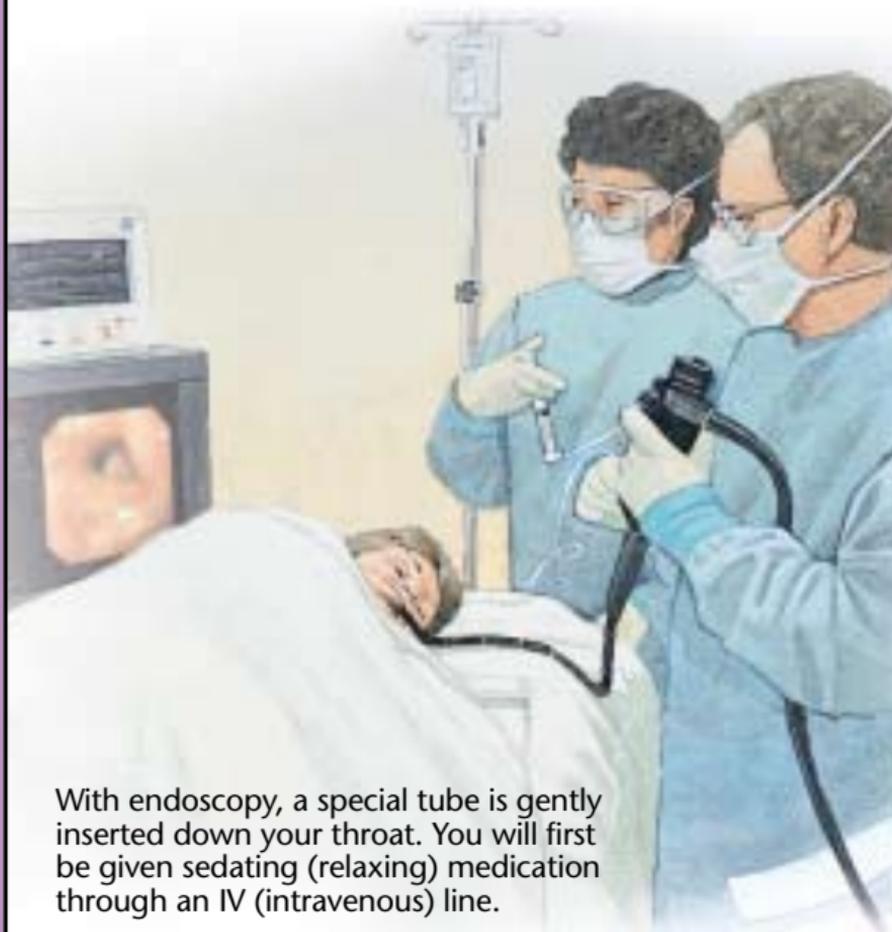
## Health History

The doctor may ask you about your health and symptoms. Tell him or her how long you've had these symptoms. Also mention the types of foods or liquids that are hard for you to swallow. You may be asked if you take any medications.

## Tests You May Have

You may need any of the following special tests:

- **An endoscopy** to look directly into your esophagus using a long flexible tube.
- **A barium x-ray** to obtain an image of your esophagus. You'll be asked to drink a chalky liquid containing barium to enhance the x-ray image.
- **A manometry test** to assess the strength and function of your esophagus muscles. A thin tube (catheter) measures esophagus muscle contractions.



With endoscopy, a special tube is gently inserted down your throat. You will first be given sedating (relaxing) medication through an IV (intravenous) line.

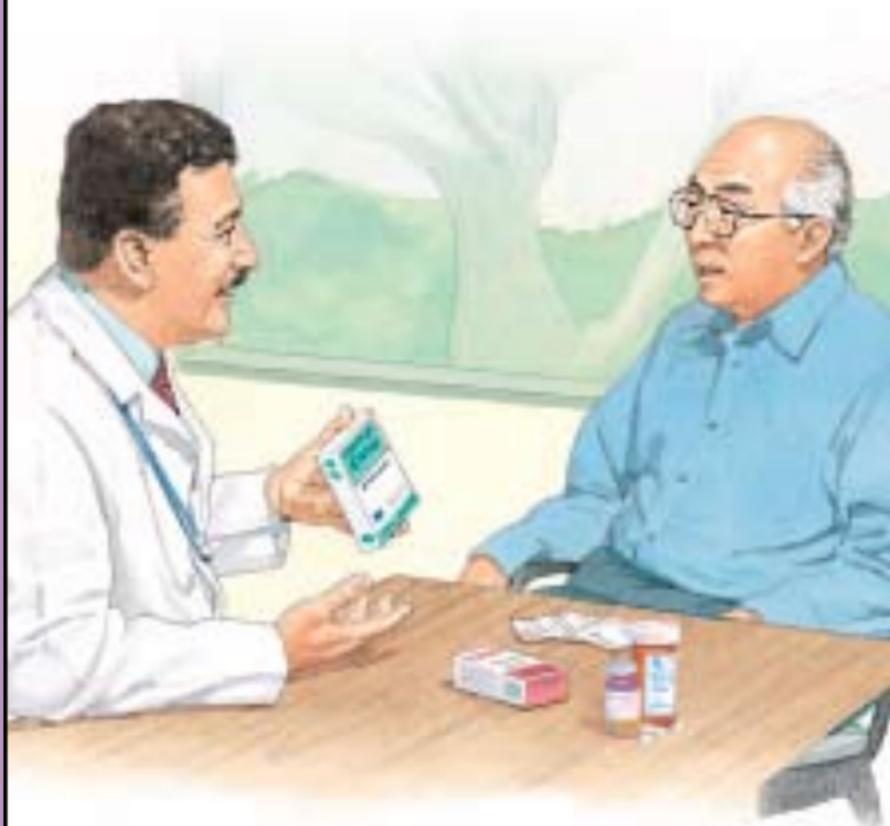
## Your Treatment

Your doctor will make a treatment plan based on the results of your evaluation. You may need to take medications. And in some cases, your doctor may suggest dilating the esophagus.

### Medications

Depending on the cause of your dysphagia, prescription or over-the-counter medications may be needed. Your doctor can tell you more about them. You may need medications to:

- Neutralize or reduce stomach acids
- Control esophagus muscle spasms



Talk to your doctor before you take any medications.

### Esophagus Dilation

Dilation is a procedure that your doctor can use to widen the esophagus. It is most often done when a stricture is causing your dysphagia. There are a number of ways your doctor can widen the esophagus. He or she can discuss them with you.

# What You Can Do

To help control dysphagia, follow your treatment plan. Take all medications as directed. And help lessen your dysphagia symptoms by being careful about what and how you eat.

## Eating Tips

With dysphagia, you may have problems eating enough food to get the energy your body needs. You may also have to be careful about what and how you eat. Try these tips to help make eating easier and safer:

- Eat slowly in a relaxed setting.
- Don't talk while you eat.
- Take small bites.
- Sit in an upright position during and after meals.
- Ask your doctor about any special diets that may help, such as liquid diets.
- Use a blender to purée solid foods, if needed.
- Thicken liquids with milk, juice, broth, gravy, or starch to make swallowing easier.

This product is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care.

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