

Eating Safely: How SLPs Help COVID-19 Survivors With Swallowing Problems

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can help people with—or recovering from—COVID-19 who are having short- and longer-term difficulties with safely eating and drinking. **Here's what SLPs do:**



- **Test swallowing function.** SLPs use different types of tests to determine what happens when a person swallows and how the related muscles are working. This helps a survivor's medical team, which includes the SLP, decide on the best course of action with the person and their family.
- **Recommend modified diets.** SLPs may recommend modified textures of food and drink for survivors; adhering to a modified diet makes swallowing easier and safer.
- **Help inform decisions on tube/assisted feeding.** In severe cases, some people may not be able to safely eat or drink anything and may need a feeding tube to get their nutrition and hydration. This is usually temporary and occurs at a critical stage in the recovery process. SLPs are part of the team that helps to decide whether this is the best option for an individual. Malnutrition and dehydration can negatively impact a person's recovery.
- **Teach safe eating and drinking strategies.** SLPs may teach strategies to make swallowing safer. This can involve optimizing a person's positioning while eating and modifying the pace of chewing/eating, size of food, and more to reduce the risk of choking or aspirating. *Aspiration* is when food or liquid enters the lungs.
- **Provide therapy exercises.** SLPs teach exercises to strengthen the tongue, lips, and muscles in the mouth and throat to enable safer eating and drinking.
- **Educate families.** SLPs inform families of ways they can help their loved ones manage a swallowing disorder. This may include everything from keeping a journal of meals to preparing foods for them in a certain way.

To learn more and to find an SLP, visit www.asha.org/public.

