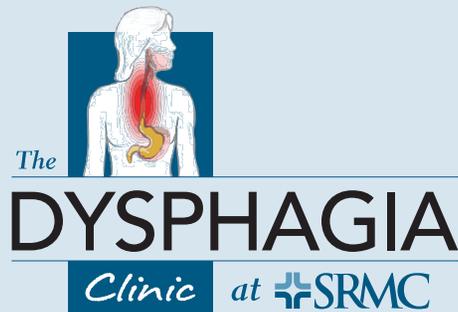




Swallowing is a voluntary and involuntary response that most people take for granted.

The swallow system is actually a complex process that involves more than 50 pairs of muscles and six cranial nerves to move food from the mouth to the stomach.

Thanks to The Dysphagia Clinic at Southside Regional Medical Center, residents of the Tri-Cities and southside Virginia can obtain treatment for the swallowing condition known as “dysphagia,” oftentimes the result of a stroke or other medical condition.



Southside Regional Medical Center is directly or indirectly owned by a partnership that proudly includes physician owners, including certain members of the hospital's medical staff.

Proper Diagnosis is the Key – How Modified Barium Swallows Work

Because an accurate diagnosis for dysphagia is the key to beginning treatment, your physician may wish to have you undergo a special imaging procedure called a Modified Barium Swallow. A MBS is an X-ray on video of a patient swallowing varying textures of barium. Patients are given different consistencies; from thin liquids to pudding to a piece of coated cracker to determine what foods they are swallowing safely.

The MBS procedure is superior to previous methods of testing a patient's degree of dysphagia, such as bedside evaluation. During a MBS, the swallowing system can be visualized and assessed - via live video – and disorders of the oral, pharyngeal and esophageal phase of swallow are identified. Signs and symptoms of swallowing dysfunction observed are linked to dysfunctions in the swallow system. This enables the speech pathologist to identify impaired muscle groups that will be targeted during treatment.

The Importance of Treating Dysphagia

People who suffer from dysphagia may find it challenging to take in enough daily calories and fluids to nourish the body. And for those with medical conditions like stroke, Parkinson's disease, and certain types of cancers, proper nutrition and hydration are extremely important to their care and rehabilitation. In severe cases, dysphagia can even be life-threatening. If weak swallowing muscles fail to move food and liquids toward the stomach, bits of food and/or liquids may fall into the windpipe (trachea), increasing the chance of a lung infection and pneumonia as a result of aspiration.

Treating The Condition Through Neuromuscular Stimulation

Treatments for dysphagia usually include diet modification (eating softer food, thicker or thinner liquids) along with dysphagia therapy, which involves strengthening weak muscular structures in the oral and pharyngeal areas. The Dysphagia Clinic at Southside Regional Medical Center utilizes a highly effective treatment known as VitalStim Therapy. This therapy is administered by a specially trained Speech Pathologist who conducts the VitalStim therapy and monitors a patient's progress throughout the treatment process. The therapy uses neuromuscular electrical stimulation to help “re-educate” the muscles used for swallowing. Specially designed electrodes emit small electrical currents to specific muscles to help stimulate swallowing. The strength and effectiveness of the muscles is improved with continued therapy until the patient's swallowing reaches an optimal level. Biofeedback and traditional dysphagia treatment strategies are utilized in conjunction with neuromuscular stimulation to optimize treatment results. Patients can usually see improvement in their swallowing in about 14 treatment sessions.

Symptoms Related to Dysphagia May Include:

- Coughing, choking or frequent throat clearing when eating or drinking.
- Frequent pneumonia or respiratory infections.

Want To Learn More Or Make An Appointment?

For more information about Dysphagia or to schedule an appointment with a dysphagia treatment provider call 804.765.5170.