



PATIENT EDUCATION

Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia) during radiation

A plain-language guide for patients and families. Bring this to your visit. It does not replace advice from your clinician.

What is dysphagia?

Dysphagia means swallowing is hard, painful, or unsafe. Radiation to the throat, chest (esophagus), or sometimes the brain can contribute. You may feel food stick, cough with sips, or avoid meals. The worry is food or liquid going into the lungs (aspiration) and weight loss.

What you may notice

- Pain on swallow (odynophagia) or a tight “stuck” feeling
- Coughing, wet voice, or extra throat clearing during meals
- Longer meal times or dropping foods you used to enjoy
- Chest discomfort after pills

First-line care

Sit upright to eat. Take small bites. Choose moist, soft textures. Alternate sips and bites if you were taught that. A speech-language pathologist (swallow therapist) can test safety and give exercises. Pain control before meals matters as much as food choice.

Where CureRays may fit. If you cough with every sip or have a fever after meals, call the same day. We may change textures, add medicine for esophagitis, or discuss a temporary feeding tube. That discussion is about keeping you strong — not giving up. Confirm changes with your care team.

What treatment usually involves

- Immobilization (mask or arm position) so the beam matches the plan each day
- Weekly weight and swallow questions
- Coordination with nutrition if calories fall



Practical tips

- **Pills.** Ask which can be crushed or switched to liquid. Never crush a long-acting pill without asking.
- **Textures.** Yogurt, eggs, casseroles, and smoothies often beat dry meat or bread.
- **After meals.** Stay upright 20–30 minutes if reflux is part of the picture.
- **Exercises.** Do swallow exercises only as taught — the wrong drill can worsen strain.

When to call the clinic

- Choking that does not clear, or you cannot swallow saliva
- Fever, wet cough after meals, or shortness of breath
- Chest pain with swallowing that is new or severe
- Rapid weight loss or you skip more than a day of nutrition

Questions to ask

- Do I need a swallow study or a therapist this week?
- What texture is safe for me right now?
- Should we talk about a feeding tube before I get weaker?
- Which pain medicine should I take before lunch?

How to schedule or learn more

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