

MEDIA RELEASE

Food and drink to die for!

Most Australians are unaware of how difficulties with swallowing can be frightening and life threatening. Most of us take eating and drinking for granted, but for some people, food and drink may literally be to die for!

It's why on **Wednesday, 15 March 2017**, Speech Pathology Australia is campaigning to promote *Swallowing Awareness Day*. The theme for the day is: *Food and drink to die for*.

The average Australian swallows **900** times a day. That's around three times an hour during sleep, once per minute while awake and even more during meals. It's something every Australian is doing. But very few of us are talking about it.

Swallowing Awareness Day 2017 is an opportunity to bring attention to swallowing disorders and to connect people with speech pathologists, the professionals who can help. Speech Pathologists assess and treat people with Dysphagia (difficulty swallowing) – pronounced 'dis-fay-juh'.

Speech Pathology Australia estimates **around 1 million Australians** have difficulty with swallowing.

Swallowing disorders remain largely invisible, poorly understood by the general community, and rarely addressed in government policy.

Swallowing problems can mean food, drinks or saliva gets into the lungs (**aspiration**) and this can cause lung infections (pneumonia). Severe swallowing complications, including choking, can lead to death, while other swallowing complications can lead to poor nutrition, dehydration, health complications, and social isolation.

The cost to affected individuals is measured in dollars through added health costs, limitations to their participation in the wider society, and in negative impacts on their social and emotional wellbeing. The cost to the wider community includes increased costs **through longer hospital stays**.

Australians with undiagnosed difficulties are frequently referred to other health practitioners — often for expensive and invasive investigations — when a speech pathologist could readily manage the problem.

Gaenor Dixon, Speech Pathology Australia National President, said "A swallowing problem can occur at any stage of life. Swallowing is a skill developed from infancy."



“Babies born prematurely or children with abnormalities with the structure of their head, neck and face, such as cleft lip or palate can have difficulty feeding.”

Around 15-30 per cent of people aged 65 and over living in the community have a swallowing difficulty, with that figure rising to over 50 per cent for older Australians living in a nursing home. **And, after falls, choking is the second biggest killer of nursing home residents.**

“Almost half of everyone who has had a stroke will have a swallowing problem,” added Ms Dixon.

“Sixty-nine per cent of people with Parkinson’s disease will have swallowing difficulties, as will **25 per cent** of people with Multiple Sclerosis.”

“Swallowing Awareness Day is an opportunity for all of us to learn more about swallowing difficulties and how they impact on the lives of our friends, neighbours and our wider community.”

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[Speech Pathology Australia](#) is the national peak body representing more than 7,500 speech pathologists. The Association supports and regulates the ethical, clinical and professional standards of its members, as well as lobbying and advocating for access to services that benefit people with communication and swallowing difficulties.

