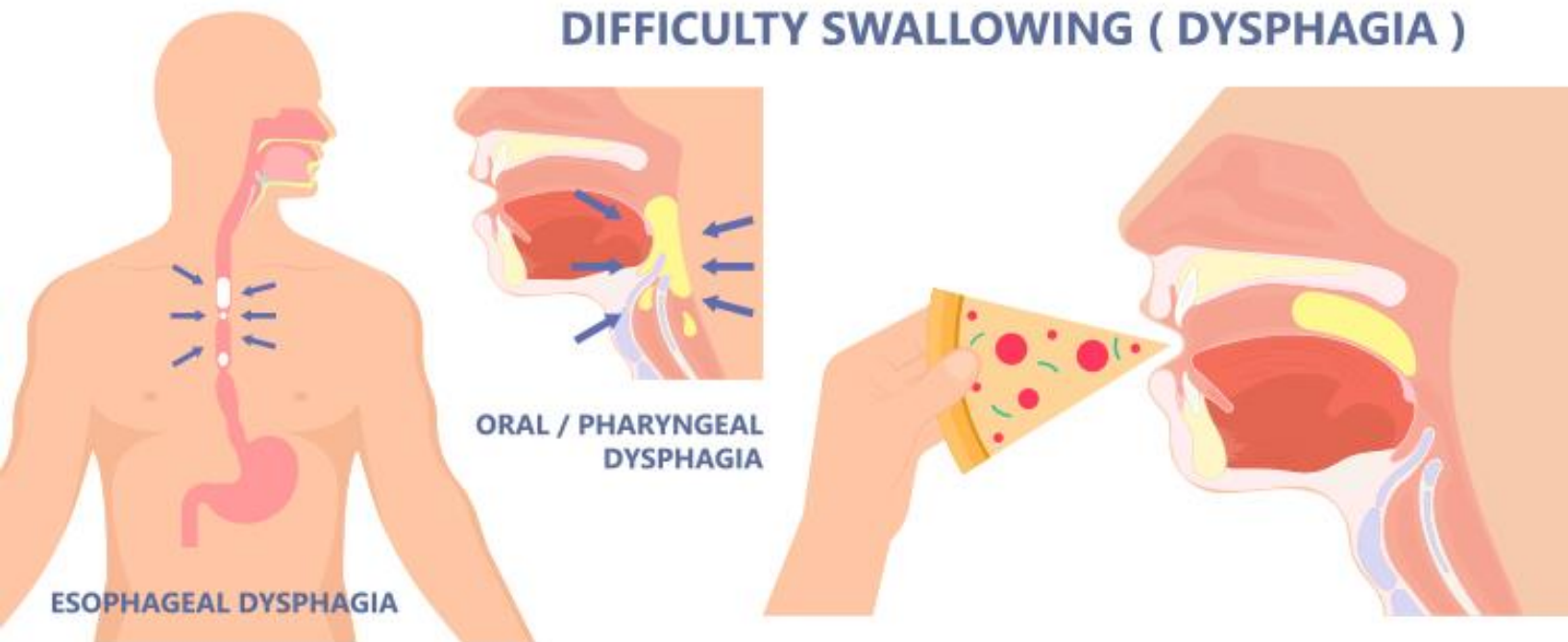


DIFFICULTY SWALLOWING (DYSPHAGIA)



DIFFICULTY IN SWALLOWING (DYSPHAGIA)

By: Director of Gastroenterology Department



Introduction

It means that more time and effort is needed to move the food &/or liquids from your mouth to the stomach along with a feeling of something sticking in the throat and usually signifies some sort of obstruction or narrowing down the food passage.

Occasional dysphagia may be due to improper chewing of the food but persistent dysphagia may indicate serious conditions. It is commonly seen in elder population but can happen at any age.

It is a very serious symptom, should never be taken lightly as it may be associated with underlying serious disease such as cancer hence requires urgent consultation with the doctor (gastroenterologist).

Symptoms

The associated symptoms may include:



Unexpected Weight loss, another important and alarming symptom that should never be overlooked and may signify some serious underlying disorder



Decrease hemoglobin (anemia)



Pain during swallowing



Feeling of food being stuck in the chest



Chest pains



Heartburn

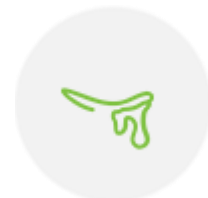
Other symptoms may include



Change in voice



Cough



Dribbling of saliva

Causes



Esophageal cancer



Foreign body



Heart burn with complications



Esophageal strictures



weak or absent movement of food pipe (weakness of the swallowing muscles)



Neurological diseases like stroke



Radiation therapy etc

Diagnosis



Diagnosis is made based on the history, clinical examination and some tests.

These may include blood tests, special x rays and other radiological imaging.

An upper gastrointestinal endoscopy is the most important test that helps in diagnosis and further plan. It is performed with the help of a camera tube that goes down the throat and

examine the food pipe, stomach and first part of small intestine. It is usually performed under sedation and is safe and painless.

Treatment

Treatment of dysphagia depends upon the cause. It may vary between medical management and endoscopy based treatment like dilation of Esophagus or putting a metallic stent. Surgery is considered in some patients depending on the cause of the

symptoms. Patients with neurological cause may require learning exercises, liquid diet or even a feeding tube.