

Dysphagia and medication

Many commonly used drugs have a negative effect on swallowing. Often these effects are not listed in the drug reference books (eg MIMS; Physicians Desk Reference). The main adverse effects of medication include decreased salivation, tongue control and mobility, and taste. Reduced frequency of swallowing has a paradoxical increase in the amount of reflux. Changes in taste and smell will affect appetite and food intake.

Dysphagia may result from medications for the following reasons:

- as a normal side effect of the drug
- as a complication of the drug
- drug-induced esophagitis

Drug	Drug Effect
benzodiazapines tricyclic antidepressants anticonvulsants antiparkinsonian drugs neuroleptics antihistamines analgesics cardiovascular drugs	sedation/drowsiness in varying degrees
analgesics	respiratory depression
phenothiazines haloperidol phenytoin	tardive dyskinesia (involuntary movements of the tongue, lips, face, trunk, and extremities)
tricyclic antidepressants phenothigines (haloperidol)	parkinsonism
tricyclic antidepressants anti-cholinergics atropine antihistamines antihypertensives diuretics	xerostomia (dry mouth)
cholinergic drugs	excess saliva
cytotoxic drugs phenylbutazone	stomatitis
analgesics (dextrapoxphene) antiepileptic (sodium valproate) lithium tricyclic antidepressants bromacriptine	dysarthria (slurred speech)
progesterone dopamine alcohol fat	decreased oesophageal sphincter tone

Suggestions to assist with taking medication

- investigate alternative forms and routes of intake
- capsules are easier than tablets to swallow
- 100 ml of cold carbonated fluid (if the resident can tolerate this)
- use yoghurt (if medication can be taken with dairy products), puree or thick fluid rather than honey or jam

Suggestions to assist with xerostomia (dry mouth)

- ceasing or reducing drug dose or switching to different drug - consult pharmacist
- water spray
- artificial saliva
- cholinergic drugs
- lollies are NOT advocated for dysphagic patients because of the high risk of choking in this population.

Resources

Campbell-Taylor, I. (2001). *Dysphagia and medication*, Interactive Therapeutics Inc. (available from <http://www.interactivetherapy.com/Merchant/Newprod.ihml>)