

Pharyngeal phase

- Loss of sensation within the pharynx resulting in absent or delayed initiation of the pharyngeal phase – aspiration prior to the swallow
- Incomplete closure of the vocal folds – aspiration during the swallow
- Incomplete elevation of the larynx resulting in failure to clear all material from the pharynx – aspiration after the swallow

Oesophageal phase

- Loss of peristalsis
- Stricture / obstruction

The normal response to aspiration is a cough. However loss of sensation or poor respiratory status may result in a weak or absent cough, i.e. silent aspiration. Aspiration is a significant cause of chest infections or pneumonia. The signs and symptoms associated with dysphagia are outlined in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Signs & symptoms of dysphagia

- History of choking ✱
- Cough before, during or after the swallow ✱
- History of chest infections
- Change in breathing pattern or shortness of breath when eating / drinking ✱
- Wet, bubbly voice quality
- Weight loss
- Prolonged mealtimes
- Refusal to eat / drink
- Regurgitation ✱

Who might be at risk of dysphagia?

Dysphagia is not a disease but a symptom caused by structural or neurological dysfunction. Prevalence varies according to the