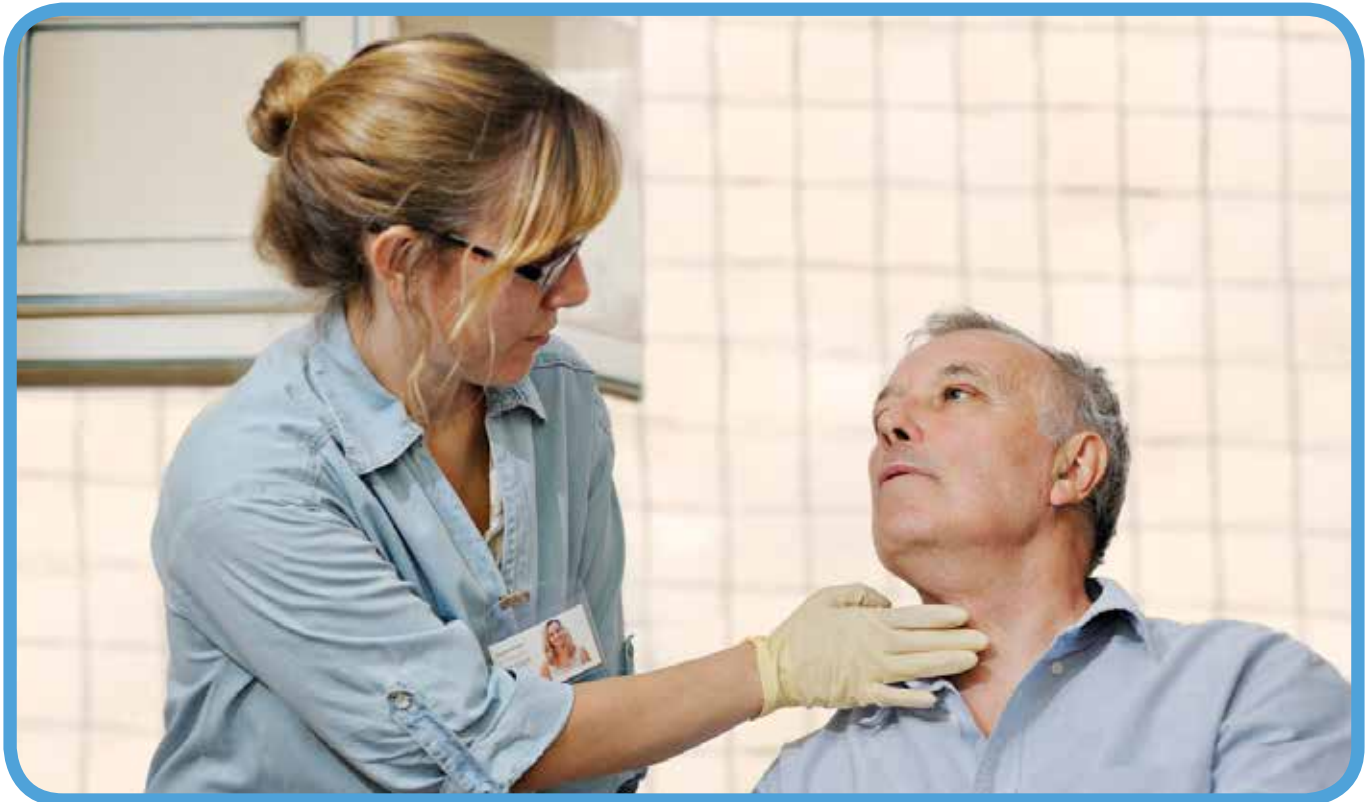


Long COVID: Swallowing



Why does Long Covid affect my swallowing?

Following COVID-19, some people develop **sensitivity or irritation** in their throat. You may find you are coughing more frequently which can cause tightness in the throat or a feeling that your breathing is restricted. If the throat muscles become tight after lots of coughing, you may experience the sensation of food and tablets sticking when you eat.

COVID-19 can also affect the **pattern of breathing** even if our lungs are working normally. People with long COVID sometimes feel breathless when eating. There can be an incoordination of the breath-swallow cycle. Usually you breathe out after swallowing but if the body feels out of breath

you may breathe in instead. When this happens, tiny crumbs of food may 'catch' and make you cough when eating because you are breathing in, instead of out, straight after swallowing.

COVID-19 can cause an increase in **reflux** for some people. Reflux is where acid from the stomach comes up the gullet. For some people it can come up higher into the throat, this can cause symptoms such as sore throat, frequent throat clearing or a feeling of a lump in the throat all of which can affect swallowing. For more information see the long COVID: Reflux and long COVID: Voice factsheets.

Common changes in swallowing in long COVID include:

- Occasional coughing when eating and drinking
- The sensation of food 'sticking' on swallowing
- Difficulty getting the swallow 'going'
- Difficulty with swallowing tablets
- Feeling more breathless when eating and drinking
- Sensation of a 'lump' in the throat
- Taking longer to eat
- Losing interest in food, a reduced appetite or avoiding certain textures
- Increased reflux

Signs that you should speak to your GP:

- Coughing / spluttering more often when eating and drinking
- Sounding wet and gurgly when eating / drinking
- Choking events where you stop breathing when eating and drinking
- Regular chest infections
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain on swallowing
- Constant earache on swallowing (in both or particularly in one ear)

How to help with swallowing



Try not to eat or drink when you are especially breathless or fatigued



Always sit upright in a supported chair when you are eating and drinking. If you can, eat at a table



Minimise distractions such as the television



Eat slowly and take small mouthfuls



Select foods that are soft and easy to chew, or add sauce or gravy to moisten foods



Have smaller, more frequent meals, and take a break during your meal if you become too short of breath



Try to breathe out immediately after you swallow to help clear any food or fluid left in your throat



Alternate between sips of fluids and small bites of solids



Try to minimise talking during mealtimes to reduce the exertion on your breathing



Remain upright for 30 minutes after your meal