

# General Guidelines for Assisting with Eating & Drinking

Always refer to individual mealtime guidelines when assisting a person to eat and drink to ensure the correct positioning, equipment, consistencies, facilitation techniques and feeding strategies are followed.

## General guidelines for assisting with eating:

- Ensure the person is alert and able to focus on the mealtime task
- Encourage the person to be as active as possible in the process
- Concentrate on the person you are assisting. Monitor closely how they are coping with the meal and adjust your pace to suit their need
- Offer choices where possible about the foods/fluids to be consumed
- Use appropriate and recommended equipment correctly
- Talk to the person you are assisting (eg tell them what is on the spoon/fork or in the cup, particularly if they have a visual impairment)
- Do not overload the spoon/fork. Keep the amounts of food small as students with eating difficulties often cannot manipulate food well for chewing or swallowing. Large mouthfuls can be very uncomfortable and even frightening. Smaller amounts will be eaten more efficiently; excess food or fluid will only be spat out.
- Allow the person time to see and prepare themselves for a mouthful
- Remember food and fluid always comes from below the mouth line
- Always present food items centrally, slightly below the mouth (bottom lip level) to encourage a forward chin tuck position
- Keep movements smooth and predictable
- Provide cues and reminders about positioning for safe eating and swallowing
- Wait for the person to swallow and clear the mouth before offering the next mouthful
- Allow the child time to clear the mouth before offering another mouthful
- Where appropriate encourage attempts to hold and use utensils but do not allow them to become play items
- Specific eating techniques are very often needed for people with particular oral problems such as a thrusting tongue movement, bite reflex, lack of chewing or poor lip control. Refer to individual guidelines or specific information from a speech pathologist about managing these types of problems.
- Be familiar with organisational choking procedures should an incident occur.



## General guidelines for assisting with drinking:

- Ensure the person is alert and able to focus on the drinking task
- Tilt the head slightly forward and down, so the chin is tucked in to help protect the airway when swallowing
- Place the cup firmly on the bottom lip to create a good seal under the rim of the cup
- Support the jaw and or bottom lip if necessary
- Try to avoid contact with the teeth
- Ensure the top lip is in contact with the fluid so the person can suck in the fluid and control the flow
- Use an appropriate or recommended cup for the individual
- Present liquids with a fair warning and very closely monitor the amount and how this is swallowed
- Offer one sip or mouthful at a time
- Allow time for the person to swallow. The person may otherwise feel as if they are 'drowning' and this can be very frightening
- Encourage the use of a strong 'plunge' swallow to push the fluid down smoothly
- Encourage the person to breathe out following a swallow to ensure the airway is clear of any fluid residue
- Monitor the amount of fluid being swallowed or spit
- Pace the drinking rate with the persons needs. **Do not rush!**
- Should the person have difficulty encourage repeated swallowing and or coughing to clear the airway
- Be familiar with organisational procedures for aspiration (inhalation) and choking.

