



## **Symptom Management: Swallowing Difficulties & Coughing Up Of Blood**

Dysphagia is the medical term for difficulty in swallowing. Some people with dysphagia have problems swallowing certain foods or liquids, while others cannot swallow at all. This problem, if not dealt with, can lead to loss of weight and dehydration, and can be a very distressing symptom.

### **Causes**

People with lung cancer who have a central tumour or bulky central lymph nodes, where the cancer is squashing on the oesophagus (food pipe), can experience difficulty in swallowing.

Sometimes it will appear 'the food will not go down'. Others are able to swallow the food but will then vomit it back. Occasionally people can also experience pain or a burning sensation on swallowing.

Some people who have radiotherapy to the centre of the chest can experience difficulty or soreness in swallowing; this is usually a temporary side effect.

### **Management**

- Ensure you report this problem to your doctor and specialist nurse; they will ensure an accurate assessment of the cause is investigated.
- The investigations you may require could be a scan, a camera test and a speech and language therapy swallow assessment.
- Sometimes, if the tumour reduces in size, the pressure on the food pipe may be reduced. Therefore treatments such as steroids, radiotherapy and chemotherapy can be used if appropriate.
- There are some medicines that may help such as antacids, and other stomach medications. These should only be used under medical supervision.
- A change in diet may be necessary to ensure you are receiving adequate nutrition and fluids; a referral to a dietician may be helpful.

Source: National Lung Cancer Forum For Nurses

## **Haemoptysis (Coughing up of Blood)**

Haemoptysis is the coughing up of blood originating from the respiratory tract. This is a symptom that can occur in someone who has lung cancer, and can be very distressing to patients and carers. Up to one third of patients with lung cancer develop haemoptysis.

### **Causes**

It is important to establish that the blood or blood stained material has come from the chest and not the Nose, upper respiratory tract, or Gastro Intestinal tract.

Usually caused by the cancer invading a blood vessel in the lungs, causing it to bleed, and other causes are infection, clot on the lung, or blood clotting disorders. Coughing of blood can be transient or persistent and rarely causes a major problem.

### **Management**

- Ensure your doctor is aware and assessed the cause and severity of the bleeding.
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- Sometimes a drug can be used to cause the blood to clot quicker such as Tranexamic acid.
- Radiotherapy or laser therapy to the chest area can be very effective in sealing the bleeding blood vessel
- Very occasionally patients can have massive bleeding; in this case management should be regarded as an emergency whether or not resuscitation is appropriate. Your doctor will then advise on the care required.