The mission of Allegheny Health Network’s Swallowing Center is to provide diagnostic evaluation for diseases of the pharynx, esophagus and stomach. The problems addressed by the center include difficulty swallowing, aspiration, chronic cough, GERD, hiatal hernia, Barrett’s esophagus, esophageal cancer, pharyngeal and esophageal diverticulum, and achalasia.

The unique services offered can provide invaluable information which assists in treatment, including medical and surgical therapies. Based on patient symptoms, Swallowing Center providers will select, perform and analyze the tests, which will lend insight into the cause of the problem. A detailed and tailored interpretation of test results will be generated and communicated to referring providers along with recommendations for therapy.
Speech & Language Resources at the Esophageal and Lung Institute’s Swallowing Center

The Esophageal and Lung Institute offers a full range of speech-language pathology services provided by an experienced, licensed and certified speech-language pathologist. At the Esophageal and Lung Institute’s Swallowing Center, the speech-language pathologist is equipped to address the following areas:

Swallowing difficulty caused by:
- Stroke, Parkinson’s Disease or other neurological disorders
- Previous radiation therapy
- Post-surgical changes
- The aging process and/or debility

Some frequent indications that you — or someone you know — may be experiencing a swallowing problem are:
- Frequent coughing when eating and especially when drinking (even water)
- Having trouble moving food around in the mouth, maybe pocketing food in the cheek
- Experiencing a decrease in the amount of food consumed and an increase in the amount of time it takes to eat a meal
- Difficulty with food passing after swallowing
- Weight loss
- Frequent pneumonia and/or upper respiratory infections
- Dehydration
- The feeling of food sticking in the throat
- Significant coughing after a meal
- An increase in phlegm especially after eating

In addition to evaluating and treating people with swallowing difficulty, the speech-language pathologist is also experienced and trained in treating people with:

Voice Disorders
- Hoarseness
- Breathy-sounding voice
- Harsh-sounding voice
- Times when no voice or little voice is heard when speaking
- Feeling “winded” when speaking
- Tension in your throat with speaking
- Unusual pitch or limited pitch range
- Low volume of voice

Disorders of Speech or Language
- Difficulty producing clear speech understood by others
- Difficulty with word-finding and expression
- Difficulty with understanding language of others

These communication disorders can be found after certain types of stroke or neurologic disorders.

The Swallowing Center at the Esophageal and Lung Institute can provide these services at five convenient locations:
- Allegheny General Hospital
- Forbes Hospital
- Peters Township Health + Wellness Pavilion
- West Penn Hospital
- Wexford Health + Wellness Pavilion

The Swallowing Center core team includes:
Paula Tirpak, MS, CCC/SLP, senior speech-language pathologist and Swallowing Center director
Blair A. Jobe, MD, director, Esophageal and Lung Institute
Rodney Landreneau, MD, co-director, Esophageal and Lung Institute
Toshitaka Hoppo, PhD, MD
Yoshihiro Komatsu, MD
Joan Schrenker, RN, CGRN
Rachel Harkin, MS, RD, LDN, Dietitian

To schedule an appointment with one of our speech language pathologists, please call 724.260.7300.