

Dysphagia

Dysphagia refers to any disorder of swallowing. Figures from questionnaire based surveys of LEOP have shown 6⁷¹ to 22⁷⁰ percent of post-polio individuals reporting swallowing difficulties.

The presence of previous bulbar polio seems to predispose the individual to motor speech and swallowing deficits in later years. It has also been suggested that new swallowing symptoms may emerge as late effects of polio regardless of the original type of polio and whether or not the individual was aware of the symptoms of dysphagia.¹⁰¹ Laryngeal penetration and loss of the cough reflex may occur without symptoms. As a result the presence and severity of dysphagia in this population may be underestimated.

A study by Sonies and Dalakas (1991)¹⁰¹ using video fluoroscopy to evaluate post-polio subjects, revealed pharyngeal constrictor weakness, impaired tongue movements, pooling in the valleculae or pyriform sinuses and, rarely, aspiration. A further study by Silbergleit and colleagues (1990)¹⁰² found unilateral weakness of the tongue or palate in 80 percent of their subjects and laryngeal abnormalities in 57 percent.