Treatment strategies may include:

- Changing the consistency of food and liquids
- Exercises to improve strength, range of motion, or coordination of weak facial or swallowing muscles
- Modification of body position during and after meals
- Strategies to improve the effectiveness and safety of swallowing
- Adjustment to the rate, volume and method of eating or drinking
- In some situations, your physician may determine that medication or surgery is appropriate

*When can I expect improvement?*

No two people are the same. Rate and degree of improvement depend on a number of factors such as age, severity of the problem, cause of the problem, co-existing medical conditions and patient commitment to swallowing therapy.

*How do I make a referral?*

To make a referral for a Swallowing Evaluation, please call the Milton J. Dance, Jr., Head and Neck Center at GBMC at 443-849-2087.
What is dysphagia?
Dysphagia is another word for a swallowing disorder. A person with dysphagia may experience difficulty swallowing food, liquid and/or saliva. Some people may be unable to swallow at all. Dysphagia occurs when there is a problem with any part of the swallowing process.

How do we swallow?
- Food or liquid is moved around in the mouth, mixed with saliva and formed into a cohesive mass (bolus)
- The bolus is moved back through the mouth with a front-to-back squeezing action performed by the tongue
- The bolus enters the throat, triggering a swallow response. Once the response is triggered, breathing momentarily stops, and the airway is closed to prevent food or liquid from passing into the lungs
- The bolus enters the esophagus (food tube) and is moved to the stomach by a squeezing action of the muscles

Who is at risk for dysphagia?
Dysphagia is a common problem that affects people for a variety of reasons. Any condition, treatment or surgery that weakens or damages the muscles and nerves used for swallowing may cause dysphagia, such as:
- Stroke
- Aging
- TIA (mini-stroke)
- Side effects of certain medications
- Xerostomia (dry mouth)
- Parkinson's Disease
- Injury or surgery to the neck or spine
- Head injury
- Cleft palate
- Head and neck cancer
- Acid reflux
- Alzheimer’s or other types of dementia
- Multiple Sclerosis

What are some symptoms of dysphagia?
- Coughing/choking during or after eating or drinking
- Wet, gurgly voice quality after eating or drinking
- Frequent throat clearing during eating or drinking
- Swallowing multiple times to get food down
- Excessive drooling
- Difficulty starting a swallow

What are some problems caused by dysphagia?
Dysphagia can be serious for a number of reasons. Some of the most common complications of a swallowing problem are:
- Pneumonia or other respiratory problems
- Choking or airway obstruction
- Malnutrition
- Dehydration
- Weight loss
- Oral yeast infection (thrush/candida)
- Dental cavities

How is dysphagia treated?
There are several treatments designed to improve swallowing. After a comprehensive assessment, your speech-language pathologist will determine the most appropriate treatment plan for your individual swallowing needs.