

Dysphagia: A Growing Burden?

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Abstract

Introduction: Data are emerging on the prevalence of swallowing problems in the general population. Cross sectional prevalence of dysphagia in younger community dwelling adults is unknown. There is a particular absence on the international perspective as well as in the younger age groups. Studies of older people, suggest a prevalence of 20% to 30% of community dwelling older people have dysphagia. Recent studies have suggested that 5.4% of young adults may also have dysphagia.

Materials and methods: An on line survey, using the EAT-10 assessment as a base was developed with additional questions from the original paper. Demographic questions were added (sex, age, nationality and country of residence). Email invitations were distributed to known contacts with encouragement to forward the email to their own contacts across the world.

Results: To date, 1,293 people have completed the online questionnaire, from 30 countries (UK, 38.5%; USA, 48.49%) and 45 identifiable nationalities. Of the respondents, 81% are females, with a median age of 35 years (mean, 37.8; range 5-88). Although, the majority of people had no problems swallowing, 411 (31.86%) reported some difficulty swallowing tablets, 237 (18.33%) reported food sticking in their throat and 205 (15.85%) reported coughing when swallowing, 14.77% (191) reported suffering with heartburn. More people had difficulty swallowing solids than liquids (6% vs 11%).

Conclusion: Swallowing problems are not common in the younger population, but are nonetheless present and are possibly undiagnosed and as a consequence not managed. It is not known what underlies the problems that people report.

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