



## St George Hospital and Community Health Services

12 April, 2017

### St George Hospital raises awareness of swallowing disorders



- (l-r) Speech Pathologists - Elarne Westwood, Emma Davies and Pip Williams.
- Trent Edwards (4S Registered Nurse) with Wendy Relf (Senior Speech Pathologist)

Speech pathologists at St George Hospital recently celebrated Swallowing Awareness Day to bring attention to the assessment and treatment of people with swallowing difficulties known as Dysphagia (dis-fay-juh).

On Wednesday 15 March 2017, St George Hospital's speech pathology department educated staff by providing a range of thickened fluids to taste and understand the challenges a patient with Dysphagia may experience.

**Emma Davies**, Speech Pathologist, St George Hospital said: "Most Australians are unaware of how a difficulty with swallowing can lead to poor nutrition, dehydration, health complications, social isolation, and could even be potentially life threatening."

It is estimated that around one million Australians experience challenges with swallowing, and one of the possible health complications is that food, drinks or saliva can get into the lungs leading to a possible lung infection.

"The average Australian swallows 900 times a day, which is approximately three times an hour during sleep, once per minute while awake and even more during meals," Emma said.



**Health**  
South Eastern Sydney  
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"Around 15-30 percent of people aged 65 and over experience challenges with swallowing, and that figure rises to over 50 percent for older Australians living in a nursing home."

Swallowing difficulties increase further for patients who have suffered a stroke, or with Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis.

**Tracy Kelly**, Speech Pathology Manager and Department Head said: "Swallowing difficulties remain largely invisible and poorly understood. We hope to raise awareness around the impact this can have on a patient, so we can work towards improved patient compliance through modified diets."