

3.13 Digestive health - dysphagia

Norma, 62, has a 4 week history of discomfort and catching in the lower gullet.

Norma: My Husband Frank insisted that I come in.

Provide: I'm glad you came about the swallowing problem. It does worry me that you've not been able to swallow properly for 4 weeks now. There are a few conditions that can cause difficulty swallowing. Some of them just cause narrowing of the gullet because of scar tissue. But it's particularly important that we don't miss a more serious condition. Was there anything that you were worried that this might be caused by?

Norma: Frank wants to make sure it's not cancer of the gullet.

Provide: The majority of people have much less serious causes for this symptom. But occasionally yes, this symptom may possibly be caused by cancer. In perhaps 1 in 20 people your age. For this reason we always refer people with your symptoms on a fast track system. So you will be seen by a specialist within 2 weeks. You're like to have a look in your gullet with a camera.

Elicit: Are you with me so far?

Norma: That sounds grim. Will they put me out for that?

Provide: You will be awake for this test, but given some drugs to make you sleepy and a numbing throat spray.

I'd like to feel your tummy today and weigh you and then my nurse will take a blood test. Please use this number to phone tomorrow, to be given an appointment within 2 weeks. Let me know how you get on and call me if your symptoms are worse.