



## Swallowing is no choking matter

DURING Speech Pathology Week, from 22 to 28 July, speech pathologists in Armidale will showcase the profession's vital role in helping those in the local community with swallowing disorders (dysphagia).

"Every day we swallow food and drink without a second thought," said Armidale Community Health speech pathologist, Jessica Clarke.

"However, this crucial function can be a daily struggle for some Australians. The condition, called 'dysphagia', involves difficulty swallowing food, liquid and/or saliva.

"Dysphagia can affect people's quality of life and in severe cases, it can be life threatening." Ms Clarke said dysphagia affects Australians of all ages.

"It is estimated the condition affects up to 70 percent of premature babies and 50 percent of all stroke patients. In adults, dysphagia may result from a number of conditions including cancer, stroke or neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

"Symptoms in adults may include coughing when eating or drinking, difficulty swallowing saliva, a gurgly voice, difficulty chewing some foods, as well as food getting stuck in or spilling from the mouth," she said.

Ms Clarke said speech pathologists play a crucial role in helping to manage these difficulties, such as diet modifications or teaching new swallowing techniques, thereby improving people's quality of life.

"Treatments available to help manage dysphagia can be very effective. If you are concerned, visit your local GP who could refer you to a speech pathologist," she said.

Speech Pathology Week provides an opportunity to raise awareness of a range of treatments available for speech and language difficulties, as well as with dysphagia.

Children visiting the Community Health speech pathologists will be invited to complete a colouring-in poster which will be displayed in the foyer of the Community Health Centre during Speech Pathology Week.

Speech Pathology Week, this year themed: Feeding and swallowing - it's no

choking matter,' is an initiative of Speech Pathology Australia, the peak national body for speech pathologists in Australia.

For more information visit: [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au).