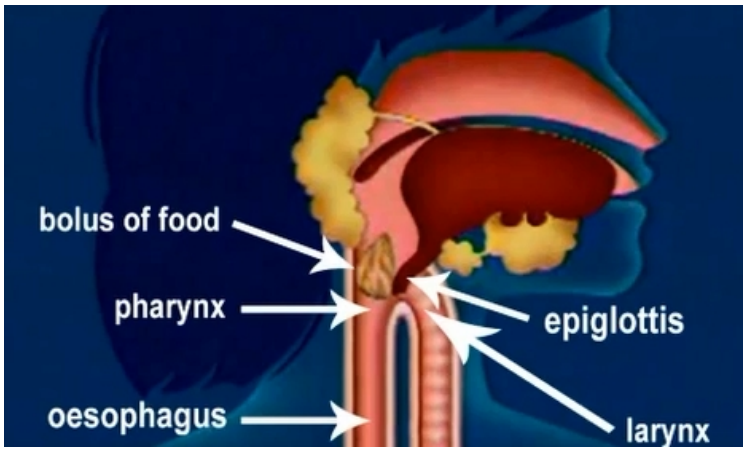
4.2.5

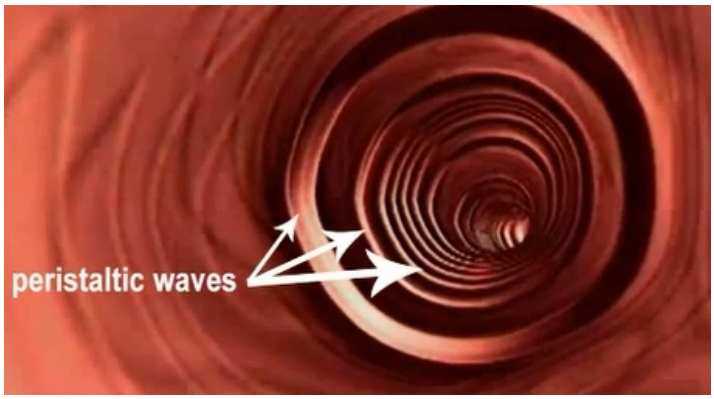
The oesophagus

DEGLUTITION

The action of swallowing food is called deglutition. The epiglottis closes to send the bolus of food toward the back of the throat, an area called the pharynx. In doing this, the epiglottis blocks the larynx, a tube leading to the lungs.



Sometimes food may get into the larynx. This is called the false passage of food or simply food going down the wrong way. At this stage in the digestive tract, the air we breathe and the food we swallow mix together.



The bolus of food then passes down the oesophagus. It moves in successive waves until it reaches the stomach. These rhythmic contractions are called peristaltic waves. The force of gravity helps these mechanical movements to move food through the digestive tract.

THE ROLE OF SALIVA

It is worth pointing out that saliva also has a role to play at this stage of digestion. It makes swallowing easier and protects the mucous membrane covering the digestive tract. Initially, swallowing is a voluntary action, meaning that we control when we swallow our food. However, once the food has reached the pharynx, the movement is a reflex, so we do not have to consciously think, “I have to lower my epiglottis to make sure food doesn’t go down the wrong way!”

4.2.5

The oesophagus

Deglutition means when food is...

- O swallowed
- O digested
- O spat out

The epiglottis allows the bolus to enter the lungs.

- O False
- O True

When we swallow, the bolus follows the correct pathway when it travels through the...

- O larynx
- O pharynx
- O biliary duct

What do we call the flap that stops the bolus from entering the lungs?

- O The hatch
- O The valve
- O The epiglottis

We talk about food going down the wrong way when the bolus travels through the...

- O pharynx
- O larynx
- O heart

What helps move the bolus through the oesophagus?

- O Electrical waves
- O Magnetic waves
- O Peristaltic waves

The oesophagus contains accessory glands.

- O True
- O False

Saliva helps us swallow and protects the mucous membrane of the digestive tract.

- O True
- O False

Answers

Deglutition means when food is...

- ● **swallowed**
  Well done! This occurs when food travels from your mouth to your oesophagus.
- ○ **digested**
  Wrong! Nice try, though!
- ○ **spat out**
  Wrong! Try again!

The epiglottis allows the bolus to enter the lungs.

- ● **False**
  Well done! Your epiglottis actually stops the bolus from entering your lungs.
- ○ **True**
  Wrong! This would cause food to 'go down the wrong way' and that's not a nice feeling.

When we swallow, the bolus follows the correct pathway when it travels through the...

- ○ **larynx**
  Wrong! Your larynx is the pathway to your lungs.
- ● **pharynx**
  Well done! Your pharynx leads to your oesophagus, which is the pathway food normally takes.
- ○ **biliary duct**
  Wrong! Try again!

What do we call the flap that stops the bolus from entering the lungs?

- ○ **The hatch**
  Wrong! Try again!
- ○ **The valve**
  Wrong! Try again!
- ● **The epiglottis**
  Well done! That's correct!

We talk about food going down the wrong way when the bolus travels through the...

- ○ **pharynx**
  Wrong! Food normally travels through your pharynx.
- ● **larynx**
  Well done! This would be the wrong pathway.
- ○ **heart**
  Wrong! That's not the right answer.

What helps move the bolus through the oesophagus?

- ○ **Electrical waves**
  Wrong! It needs the help of muscles in your oesophagus.
- ○ **Magnetic waves**
  Wrong! It needs the help of muscles in your oesophagus.
- ● **Peristaltic waves**
  Well done! Peristaltic waves are triggered by rhythmic contractions of your oesophagus.

The oesophagus contains accessory glands.

- ○ **True**
  Wrong! Think carefully about the role of your oesophagus.
- ● **False**
  Well done! The role of your oesophagus is to move food towards your stomach. It does not have any accessory glands.

Saliva helps us swallow and protects the mucous membrane of the digestive tract.

- ● **True**
  Well done! That's right!
- ○ **False**
  Wrong! Try again!