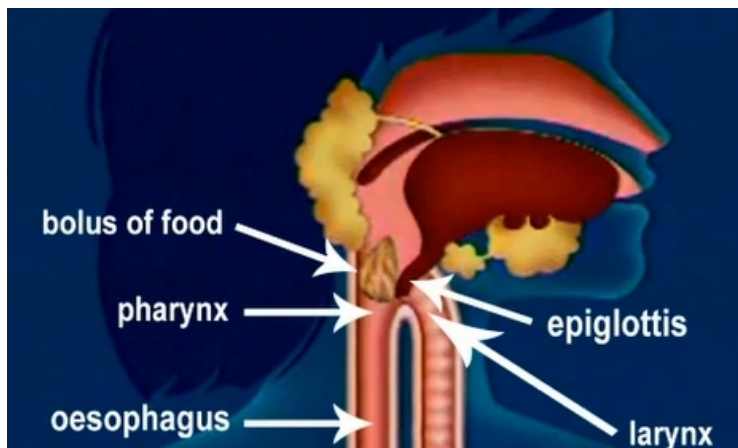


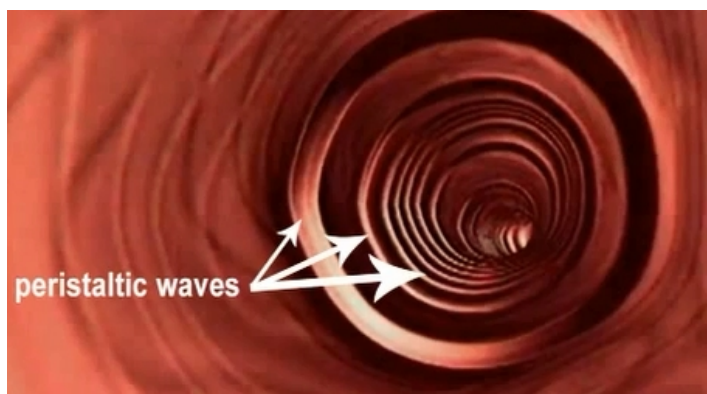
The oesophagus

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!"