

Aspiration and Aspiration Pneumonia (page 1)

Choking (page 2)

Every year, people with DD die because they have choked or aspirated. If we **educate, advocate, and take precautions**, some deaths may be prevented. When people think of leading causes of death it is generally heart disease/cancer/stroke that is thought of first. **Did you know a leading cause of death in people with DD is Aspiration Pneumonia?**

Aspiration: Aspiration occurs when food, saliva, liquids, or vomit enters into the lungs. Aspiration is more common in people with DD, because they are more prone to conditions that can affect the muscles and nerves involved in swallowing. (*Swallowing is very complex and according to Mayo Clinic, there are 50 pairs of muscles and nerves used to help you swallow. In other words, there are a lot of things that can go wrong and lead to problems swallowing; another medical name for swallowing difficulty is dysphagia.*) Aspiration may occur without signs or symptoms, the term for this is *Silent Aspiration*.

Risk factors for aspiration include but are not limited to:

- Dysphagia, immobility, tongue thrust, spinal deformities, gastro-esophageal reflux disease (commonly known as GERD). People with G-tube/J-tube who have physician orders for nothing by mouth are not excluded from aspiration from saliva or stomach content. They are at high risk for aspiration; the head of the bed should always be elevated to at least 30 degrees to help decrease this risk.

Symptoms of aspiration may include, but are not limited to:

- Drooling, pain when swallowing, coughing or gagging before/during/after swallowing, pocketing food in the cheeks, food or acid backing up in throat (regurgitation), unexpected weight loss, tiring or not finishing meals, refusal to eat certain foods or liquids, feeling like something is caught in the throat, gurgled voice during a meal, a lot of throat clearing, choking on certain foods; example white bread, trouble chewing or swallowing, fevers that come and go, coughing when lying flat.

Prevention:

- Be alert and watchful for any signs and symptoms that may be related to aspiration. Report symptoms to your supervisor and/or physician, it can possibly save a life.
- A speech language pathologist (also commonly known as a speech therapist) evaluation may be ordered
- Other testing such as a barium swallow (commonly known as a cookie swallow test) or an endoscopic procedure may be ordered and completed to determine the cause and treatment necessary.

Aspiration Pneumonia can be life threatening and should be considered an emergency:

Symptoms can be sudden or they may take up to a few days to appear.

Symptoms of aspiration pneumonia include (in any combination) but are not limited to: wheezing, chest pain, shortness of breath, fever, chills, feeling anxious, watery eyes, confusion, lightheaded or dizzy, bluish tint to skin or nails, and/or coughing with colored or foul odor sputum. **For persons with risk for aspiration, be alert to all changes, especially if they have had a vomiting or choking episode and then begin to “not act like themselves”.**

Choking: Choking occurs when a foreign object becomes lodged in the throat or windpipe, blocking the flow of air.

Risk factors and examples of prevention measures for choking:

- Unsafe eating habits: Stuffing mouth, taking too large of bites, not chewing well, or laughing/talking during meals (The epiglottis, the hinge like flap at the base of your tongue that keeps food from entering your windpipe doesn't know whether to open or close because it doesn't know whether food or air is coming when laughing or talking), rushing during mealtime, pocketing food in cheeks. **Prevention** - Line of site during meals for reminders to eat safely and monitor for complications, cutting food into smaller pieces, use of smaller utensils, making sure plenty of time is allotted to eat before work/outing/program, checking and cleaning the mouth after meals.
- Drowsiness/fatigue during meals: Some medications can cause drowsiness and/or decreased response time. **Prevention** – Report to the prescribing physician that the meds are causing problems during mealtime.
- Some conditions or diseases can also cause tiredness. **Prevention** – Allow frequent rest periods, a person may need to eat their meal in intervals.
- Slow eater: This may be caused by things such as; mouth pain, difficulty chewing, dry mouth, problems concentrating. **Prevention** – Talk with the PCP, find the cause and treat as necessary.
- Improperly fitted dentures or decayed/missing teeth: Many people with DD have had a history of poor oral health due to long term use of certain drugs such as seizure meds, improper hygiene, lack of proper dental care, etc. **Prevention** – Ensuring proper dental hygiene and checkups/cleanings are completed on a regular basis and treatments of new problems are addressed. Realigning dentures, if necessary.
- Improper body positioning with meals: Many people with DD have difficulty sitting upright during meals due to contractures, curvature of the spine or kyphosis, muscle weakness or spasms, etc. **Prevention** – Try obtaining a professional evaluation by a physical and/or occupational therapist to assess modalities that can be helpful for proper body position during mealtime.
- Some signs of difficulty eating and/or swallowing are:
 - Refusal to eat certain foods. Having food or liquid leaking from their mouths. Coughing after swallowing or with meals. Regurgitating during meals. Having trouble breathing when eating. Weight loss without trying.

Always- All swallowing difficulties and choking risk should be discussed with the primary care physician and risks/prevention should be discussed in the ISP.

Resources:

CHOKING - video <http://www.safekids.org/video/choking-prevention-families-children-special-needs>

asha.org (see page # 9 for Dining Guidelines for choking/aspiration prevention)

https://www.google.com/search?q=zimmerman-barlow-kieweg-wang&sourceid=ie7&rls=com.microsoft:en-us:IE-Address&ie=&oe=&safe=active&gws_rd=ssl

ASPIRATION PNEUMONIA

<http://www.drugs.com/cg/aspiration-pneumonia.html>

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000121.htm>

DYSPHAGIA

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dysphagia/basics/causes/con-20033444>

<http://www.swallowingdisorders.org/>

<https://patienteducation.osumc.edu/Documents/dyspha.pdf>

http://www.pdf.org/search/t/dysphagia/c/PDF_All

PUREED FOODS

<http://www.netwellness.org/healthtopics/diet/pureedfoodguidelnes.cfm>

“Swallow Safely” A book with simple reading & low cost – good resource for training and instruction. (\$15.00) <http://www.swallowsafely.com/about>

“Tool-Kits” for health/safety

<http://dodd.ohio.gov/HealthandSafety/Pages/Tool-Kits.aspx>