



ASPIRATION, ASPIRATION PNEUMONIA, & CHOKING

Pulmonary Aspiration is considered one of the leading conditions that are likely to result in death for individuals with Intellectual/Development Disabilities (IDD) according to Health Risk Screening, Inc. (Green-McGowan, n.d.). And according to a health alert by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, people with IDD are at a high risk of **choking** (Howe, 2013).

If someone is having trouble breathing or in distress, call 911 for emergency services immediately. This is a guide for recognizing and preventing aspiration, aspiration pneumonia, & choking.

DEFINITIONS:

Pulmonary Aspiration: Condition in which food, liquids, saliva, vomit, or other foreign substance is breathed into the airways.

Aspiration Pneumonia: An inflammation and infection of the lungs and is caused by pulmonary aspiration.

Dysphagia: Problems with chewing or swallowing due to muscles not working properly.

Choking: Complete blocking of the airway so no air can pass through when breathing.

OBSERVE!

eating. (Howe, 2013).

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Aspiration:

- Frequent coughing or change in cough or throat clearing,
- Loss of interest in foods or drinking,
- Losing weight or dehydrated/malnutrition/Anemia,
- Reoccurring pneumonia,
- Tired all the time,
- Has a runny nose all the time,
- Increased agitation—pushing away, throwing food,
- Sounds like they have a cold or they get lots of colds,
- Blinking and watering of the eyes,
- Blue discoloration of the skin,
- Chest or throat discomfort (reflux),
- Low grade fever/spiking a fever— can be as soon as 30 minutes—1 hour after

Aspiration Pneumonia:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Fatigue
- Blue discoloration of the skin
- Cough, possibly with green sputum, blood or foul odor
- Difficulty swallowing
- Bad breath
- Excessive sweating (Dock, Boskey, Watson, Wu, 2017)

Signs of Choking:

- Unable to talk
- Difficulty breathing or noisy breathing
- Squeaky sounds when trying to breathe
- Cough, which may either be weak or forceful
- Skin, lips and nails turning blue or dusky
- Skin that is flushed, then turns pale or bluish in color
- Loss of consciousness (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2017)



May get up

DECIDE!

York Office for People With developmental Disabilities, n.d.).

COMMON RISK FACTORS:

Dysphagia, Dental problems,
Difficulty holding head up or sitting up straight,
Impaired mobility which makes it hard to position for adequate swallowing,
Gastroesophageal reflux disease,
Medications that cause problems with throat or mouth muscles,
Eating too fast or stuffing food in mouth,
Difficulty swallowing food or fluid at inappropriate consistencies, and/or
Untrained staff member who is supporting people with special diet and eating needs (New



ACT!

Developmental Disabilities, n.d.)

PREVENTION OF CHOKING & ASPIRATION:

Obtain a swallow study
Follow physician's orders, mealtime support plan or other written instructions that tell you how to help a person when eating
Proper positioning (ideally sitting up in a chair or head of bed raised to 90 degree angle)
Avoid food and drink right before bedtime
Help the person stay upright for at least 30 minutes after eating
Do not assist person with mealtime unless you are trained
Keep CPR and First Aid certification up-to-date
(Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and

YouTube Videos that show normal vs. aspiration swallow and a video swallow study.

- "Normal and Silent Aspiration Swallow" (Lade, 2016)
- "Dysphagia Examples" (Ann C, 2015)
- "How to Identify Landmarks on Videofluoroscopy" (TCD Dysphagia, 2016)
- "Swallow Study with Aspiration" (Bow, 2015)