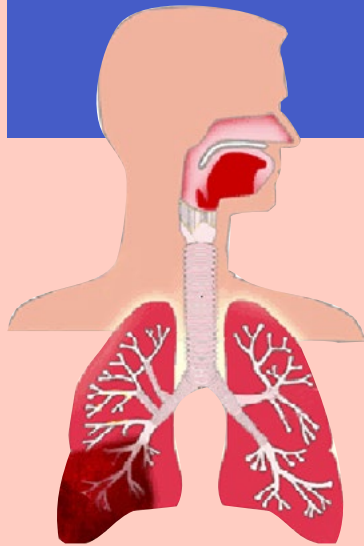




State of New Jersey
Department of Human Services
Division of Developmental Disabilities

DDD PREVENTION BULLETIN



Aspiration

Aspiration occurs when food, saliva, liquids, or vomit enters into the lungs. Aspiration may occur without signs or symptoms (Silent Aspiration).

Aspiration is more common in people with developmental disabilities, who may be prone to conditions that can affect the muscles involved in swallowing.

Conditions in people with a developmental disability that increase the risk of aspiration:

- Decreased or absent gag reflex;
- Weakness of the muscles that are used in chewing and swallowing;
- Gastro-esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD);
- Seizure disorder;
- Eating too fast or having too much food in the mouth while eating;
- Poor positioning during meals; and/or
- Medication side effects that relax the muscles used for chewing and swallowing.

Signs and Symptoms of Aspiration:

- ❖ Coughing
- ❖ Wheezing/change in breathing
- ❖ Watery Eyes
- ❖ Rumination
- ❖ Gagging
- ❖ Wet/ Gurgly voice quality
- ❖ Color change/reddening of the face
- ❖ Feeling something stuck in the throat

Aspiration Pneumonia

When food, liquids, saliva, or vomit, enter the lungs, Aspiration Pneumonia may develop. Aspiration pneumonia is a bacterial infection with inflammation of the lungs. Symptoms of Aspiration Pneumonia include:

- ❖ Chest Pain
- ❖ Wheezing
- ❖ Fatigue
- ❖ Excessive sweating
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Coughing up foul smelling sputum
- ❖ Shortness of breath



Tips for Decreasing the Risk of Aspiration:

- ❖ The individual should be seated at a 90 degree angle for all oral intake, or as recommended by a specialist;
- ❖ The individual should take small bites of indicated diet texture (1/2-3/4 teaspoon);
- ❖ The individual should take small sips of indicated beverage consistency;
- ❖ If thickened liquids are prescribed, ensure that ALL liquids are thickened (drinks, soups, cereals);
- ❖ The individual should eat at a slow rate of intake;
- ❖ The mouth should be completely empty before taking another bite or sip;
- ❖ This individual should avoid talking with food in their mouth; and/or
- ❖ Staff should ensure an unrushed atmosphere that allows for independence.

Sources

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Olmstead Resource Team



Physical Nutritional Management

