

Let's Talk About...



# Aspiration Pneumonia

## and what *YOU* can do about it.

*Aspiration pneumonia* is an infection in the lungs caused by substances or bacteria that aren't supposed to be there, like food, fluid, vomit, stomach acid, inedible materials, or even saliva. Those most at risk are people with **dysphagia** (trouble chewing or swallowing), those that get **tube feedings** (even if they don't eat or drink anything by mouth!), and those with **developmental disabilities**. Health conditions like **GERD** (acid reflux), **poor oral hygiene**, or even **constipation** can also increase the risk. Aspiration pneumonia is a **serious illness** and can even be **fatal**.

### Watch for



Coughing, especially while eating or drinking

Decreased food or fluid intake

Eating more slowly than usual

Complaining of something stuck in the throat

Change in pattern or sound of breathing

Fever, fatigue, acting differently than normal, change in vital signs, or other signs of illness

**The individuals you care for depend on you** to help them stay safe. Luckily, there are some key things you can do to prevent aspiration pneumonia.

- ✓ **Always** follow the **correct diet orders, dining plans, and choking plans**. Not doing so increases the risk of aspiration and choking drastically.
- ✓ **Always** provide or encourage the best **oral care** possible. Pieces of food left in the mouth can be aspirated, and those who are NPO can have oral bacteria that can be aspirated.
- ✓ **Always** keep the **head of the bed elevated** for those with g-tubes, GERD, or other health conditions making aspiration more likely. For some, lying flat **even during personal care** like bed baths or incontinence care can increase the risk of aspiration.
- ✓ **Ask** your supervisor or nurse if you have any questions about aspiration, the individual's diet orders, or the signs of pneumonia.
- ✓ **Report** any new or worsening symptoms or change of condition to your nurse or supervisor as soon as possible.
- ✓ **Always** give prescribed **medications** on time and don't miss any doses, especially antibiotics, those that treat GERD and those that treat constipation.
- ✓ **Always** check for residual stomach secretions before giving feedings, fluid, or medications by g-tube.

Indiana Bureau of Disabilities Services information at <https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/developmental-disability-services/>