

HEALTH & SAFETY: ASPIRATION PREVENTION

“Positioning”

BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual’s health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This document provides general information on the topic and is not intended to replace team assessment, decision making or medical advice. This is the seventh of ten Fact Sheets regarding Aspiration Prevention.

Objectives

Readers will understand appropriate positioning techniques for people who receive oral and non-oral methods of nutrition and hydration as a means to prevent aspiration.

Definitions

Supine: A position of the body in which the person is lying down with the face up.

Prone: A position of the body in which the person is lying down with the face down.

Right Sidelying: A position of the body in which the person is lying down on his/her right side.

Left Sidelying: A position of the body in which the person is lying down on his/her left side.

Positioning Schedule: A written schedule for systematically turning and repositioning the individual.

Facts

- The risk of aspiration pneumonia increases as mobility and the ability to independently position oneself decreases.
- The person may benefit from being elevated at all times including when being changed, bathed, or in bed, not just when eating or drinking.
- Lying flat at any time including during personal care or dressing increases the risk of reflux aspiration.
- All activities in which a person who is unable to position him/herself requires specific position methods:
 - Toileting and undergarment changes
 - Dressing

- Oral care
- Medication administration
- Bathing or showering
- Sleeping
- Eating, swallowing, drinking including those using Gastric tube
- Stomach emptying
- Bowel and bladder elimination
- Positions may include:
 - Wheelchair or other mobility device
 - Left sidelying
 - Right sidelying
 - Prone on forearms
 - Supine
 - Standing or kneeling

Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Identify positioning needs through a comprehensive assessment by Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech Therapy
2. Develop and implement a positioning schedule for those individuals who are at an increased risk of aspiration and/or skin breakdown and require assistance to change positions or have mobility impairments.
3. Identify best position for all oral or non oral activities through assessment
4. Generally Accepted Positions for Oral Activities:
 - Seated as upright as possible (meals, medication, and oral care)
 - Standing (medication and oral care)
 - Elevated Prone

Note: These positions are general in nature and must only be utilized upon completion of a comprehensive assessment by the IST.

5. Generally Non-Accepted Positions for Oral Activities:
 - Recliner
 - Lying in Bed
6. Generally Accepted Positions for Non Oral Intake (gastric tube):
 - Seated as upright as possible (meals, medication, and oral care)
 - Standing (medication and oral care)
 - Elevated Right Sidelying

Note: These positions are general in nature and must only be utilized upon completion of a comprehensive assessment by the IST.

7. Generally Non-Accepted Positions for Non Oral Intake:
 - Recliner
 - Lying in Bed
 - Left Sidelying
8. Use positioning devices to assist with positioning as indicated:
 - Wedges
 - Hospital bed or elevated bed with bed blocks
 - Shower trolley
 - Tilt in Space commode/shower chair
 - Custom built wheelchairs

Note: The use of these positioning devices is general in nature and must only be utilized according to directions from a qualified clinician following completion of a comprehensive assessment.

Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. True or False: Supine position is when the person is lying on their stomach and their face is down.
2. True or False: If the person is dependent for all positioning changes, they do not need a positioning schedule.
3. True or False: All activities for someone unable to position themselves require specific positioning methods.
4. True or False: The risk of aspiration pneumonia increases as the person's ability to ambulate and reposition decreases.
5. Generally accepted positions for people who are receiving oral intake include:
 - A. Lying down
 - B. Sitting upright in a regular chair
 - C. Elevated Prone
 - D. Both B and C

References

Becky Smitha OTR, ATP

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Drakulovic MB, Torres A, Bauer TT, Nicolas JM, Nogué S, Ferrer M. Supine body position as a risk factor for nosocomial pneumonia in mechanically ventilated patients: a randomised trial.

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Related Resources

Aspiration Prevention Series Fact Sheets: “Food Texture and Fluid Consistency Modification”, “Management of Constipation”, “Management of Oral Health”, “Dysphagia”, “Modified Barium Swallow Study/ Videofluoroscopy”, “Management of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)”, “Management of Residuals”, “Feeding Tubes and Feeding/Medication Administration Options”, and “Choice Considerations Relevant to the Use of Enteral Nutrition”

“General Description of Diet Textures” Handout

Learning Assessment Answers

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. D

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