

Aspiration

Remember...

Always watch for and report these signs of aspiration:

- ✓ Increased coughing, especially during mealtimes.
- ✓ A change in the sound or pattern of breathing.
- ✓ Decreased interest in food/drink.
- ✓ Complaining of feeling something "stuck" in their throat.
- ✓ Signs of infection such as a fever, decrease in oxygen saturation, acting or looking sick.

What IS aspiration?

Simply put, aspiration is when someone gets food, fluid, or some other material into their lungs. Anyone can aspirate, but some people are more at risk than others, such as those that have trouble eating or swallowing.

Do people aspirate things besides food or fluid?

Yes! People can aspirate on vomit, saliva, stomach contents, or even an inedible object they have in their mouth. This is why people who do not have oral intake of food or drink can still have problems with aspiration!

How is aspiration different from choking?

Choking happens when food, fluid, or another object is blocking the airway, and is a medical emergency. Aspiration occurs when something is inhaled into the lungs. It may require immediate medical attention in severe cases but is more likely to need ongoing treatment and can cause an infection requiring antibiotics.

Will I know if someone I care for is aspirating?

The answer is... maybe! The person may show signs like coughing at mealtimes, coughing while drinking, eating/drinking less, or sounding noisy/different when they breathe, *BUT* they may also show no signs! For these people, they only start to show signs when they develop an infection like pneumonia. This is called *silent aspiration*.

Do people only aspirate while eating?

No, they can aspirate during showers, positioning, and other activities!

What should I do if I think someone I care for is aspirating?

If the person is having trouble breathing, turning blue, or experiencing another emergent symptom, call 911! If not, report your concerns as soon as possible to your supervisor, the nurse, or the person of contact per your employer's policy.