

Basic safe swallow strategies for ALL people to follow

- Sit upright 90-degree angle during all intake (sitting upright in a chair at a table is typically 90 degrees)
- Take slow, teaspoon size bites
- Swallow all food prior to new a new bite
- Drink more often to help flush the food out of the mouth and down the throat
- Don't encourage someone to eat if they are not alert to task

What does choking look like:

- If person is coughing, they are NOT choking; however, they COULD be aspirating, which could also have a negative outcome.
- Aspiration is when food or drink falls BELOW the level of the vocal cords. The next stop is the LUNGS if it can't be coughed up.

Aspiration pneumonia is caused by bacteria attaching to the food/drink that enters the lungs. Pneumonia can be deadly.

Silent Aspiration occurs in people that have swallowing problems know as dysphasia. Aspiration is when food, liquids, or stomach contents are swallowed poorly and go into the lungs by mistake. Usually normal healthy people will turn red and begin to cough as an attempt to get the food or liquid out of the lung. However, when people get weak and swallowing worsen then aspiration can happen silently which means there will be no signs showing that this has occurred. In other words, you will not see any coughing or turning red. Aspiration is dangerous because the food, liquid, and stomach contents enter the lung which is very irritating and can develop into aspiration pneumonia.

This is very hard to treat with multiple antibiotics. This is common in the individuals with developmental disabilities as Cerebral Palsy. Individuals that are at risk of aspiration pneumonia should be monitored for increase coughing, SOB, lethargy, fever, lung congestion. In silent aspiration coughing may occur 15 to 30 minutes after meal is finished. Individuals cannot always express that they are not feeling well and have difficulty swallowing. It is up to staff to know the individuals that they support and recognize when they are acting abnormal and report to nursing or chain of commands.

Consult with a specialist

Sometimes the best thing we can do to address swallowing/choking concerns is make others aware. Get help right away. Write an incident report. Never be afraid to advocate.

- **Consult with Nursing staff**
- **Physician**
- **Talk with a Speech Pathologist**

- **See if tests are warranted**