

Travel and/or Other Significant Changes of Schedule

As more and more individuals with significant disabilities are able to take advantage of opportunities for day outings, time home with family, and overnight trips, it is important for providers and family members to be aware of certain vulnerabilities that may arise when people's schedules change. The overwhelming number of individuals will experience no difficulty and their participation in these activities will enhance their lives. Nonetheless, awareness on the part of families and providers may prevent significant problems should difficulties arise. This alert relates to potential medical issues that could develop when people's schedules change.

1. **Aspiration:**

- Individuals with swallowing difficulties of reflux disease are at risk of aspiration during holiday celebrations, visits home and vacations because of the special foods that are often served during these times. There is the possibility that less experienced hands may be softening or thickening the person's foods, and during these times caretakers may have additional distractions, or they may be fatigued, all of which has the potential to add to the person's risk of aspiration. For this reason, family/staff awareness may need to be a bit higher than normal.
- For individuals who tend to eat too fast, swallow without chewing, or try to get to foods that may pose a risk for them (peanut butter, cookie dough) a heightened awareness on the part of family and staff will be important.
- It is well to keep in mind that if an individual has had a "long day" or been more physically active, he or she may be more susceptible to the sedative effects of medications and be more vulnerable to aspiration (as well as falls or incontinence).

2. Bowel Obstruction: Changes in diet, activity level, time zones, or living situations can produce changes in bowel habits in anyone. For individuals with constipation or a history of bowel obstruction, such changes could lead to physical distress. Thus, it is important to pay attention to symptoms such as possible abdominal pain or distension (swelling), decrease in bowel movements, reluctance to eat, or vomiting. It is important to seek medical attention whenever a person experiences any of these symptoms.

3. Seizures: For those few individuals with seizure disorders, changes in schedules, diet, activity level, when medications are given, sleep patterns and amounts, and the level and nature of the sensory stimulation may all affect the seizure risk. Thus, it is important that family and staff be familiar with the individual's seizure protocol (if one exists) or knows what to do in the event there is a seizure.

4. Dehydration: If the individual is on an outing or trip that involves being outside (or inside) where it is particularly warm or there is some disruption to their usual pattern of drinking or otherwise being provided liquids there is some increased risk of dehydration. It is simply a matter that needs to be attended to by family or staff to prevent dehydration.