

**Office of Integrated Health
Health & Safety Information**

Dr. Dawn M. Adams DNP, ANP-BC, CHC
Director, Office of Integrated Health

Aspiration Pneumonia

What is Aspiration Pneumonia?

Aspiration pneumonia occurs when food, saliva, liquids, or vomit is breathed into the lungs or airways leading to the lungs, instead of being swallowed into the esophagus and stomach.

Signs and Symptoms of Aspiration Pneumonia

If an individual shows signs of frequent coughing with or after meals, this could be an indicator of impaired swallowing and subsequently of aspiration pneumonia. Additionally, shortness of breath, choking, or wheezing are also signs of aspiration pneumonia.

Risk Factors for Aspiration

- Being less alert due to medications or illness
- Problems with swallowing, choking, gagging or coughing with food or drink
- Eating very fast or placing large amounts of food in the mouth
- Seizures
- Tube feeding- especially continuous feeds

Aspiration Pneumonia Diagnosis and Treatment

Treatment for aspiration pneumonia depends on how severe the pneumonia is and how ill the individual was before the onset of aspiration pneumonia. Sometimes, an individual needs support to breathe during the course of the illness; this may require hospitalization.

Prevention of Aspiration Pneumonia

The key to preventing complications from aspiration is to recognize the problem and manage the associated risk. There are several risk assessment tools that can be utilized to help identify individuals who may be at risk for aspiration and dysphagia.

Recommendations

Individuals identified at risk for aspiration should have an individual program plan to address this issue. The program plan should address any assistance needed during meal times, correct positioning for oral intake, any adaptive equipment necessary, and signs of aspiration.

Resources

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000121.htm>