

Aspiration Pneumonia (Moderate Risk)

Pneumonia is a breathing condition in which there is swelling or an infection of the lungs or large airways. **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. Individuals, who are less mobile, less alert, eat and drink with support or independently eat or drink too fast, have continuous tube feedings and/or have multiple risk factors are at a **Moderate Risk** for aspiration pneumonia.

Risk factors for breathing in of foreign material into the lungs are (aspiration) may include but are not limited to:

- Being less alert due to medicines, illness,
- Problems with swallowing, choking, gagging or coughing with food or drink
- Eating very fast or placing large amounts of food in the mouth
- Receiving medicine that cause drowsiness or muscle relaxation
- Older age greater than 45 in individuals with DD
- GERD
- Seizures
- Tube feeding- especially continuous feeds

Some symptoms of aspiration pneumonia may include but are not limited to:

- Shortness of breath
- Fever or low body temperature
- Wheezing
- Cough, choking or gagging with oral intake
- Change in behavior, appetite or mental status

Outcomes associated with Aspiration Pneumonia include but are not limited to:

- Chronic breathing problems
- Poor oxygen exchange causing damage to heart, brain, and other organs
- Abscess, infection of extra fluid in the lungs
- Death

Recommendations: Awareness of risk is important. Be alert to symptoms of changes in a person's health status and seek guidance from a health professional for any changes. If health changes result in acute care through an ED visit, Urgent Care visit, or Hospitalization, consider re-evaluating individuals risk. You should also consider including the following in the individuals care plan:

- Regular appointments with a health care provider as recommended.
- Consulting with a physical or occupational therapists for positioning guidelines.
- Consulting with speech therapists for evaluation and for swallowing and meal time guidelines.
- Developing an appropriate observation and health monitoring structure.
- Obtaining an assessment by an Occupational Therapist for adapted equipment for eating, and positioning if appropriate.
- Following all protocols and guidance from health professionals.
- Assuring competency of the staff for implementing all recommendations made by health care providers.

References

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Please note: this information is not intended to replace the advice of a doctor or NP. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health providers with any questions about your medical condition.