Aspiration Precautions

Protecting the lungs from aspiration

Your lungs help you to breathe and bring oxygen into the body. The word, aspiration, means breathing in any object, other than air, into the lungs. If the health care team has concerns about foods, drinks, saliva or stomach content being inhaled into the lungs, then an aspiration plan is used. An aspiration plan lowers the risk of serious lung infection or breathing problems by preventing aspiration before it happens.

The risk for aspiration is greater with:

- Swallowing problems
- Poor ability to cough and clear the lungs, when needed
- Changes in alertness

What can I do as a caregiver?

Before and after eating follow these safety guidelines:

- Keep the person sitting upright at 90 degrees while eating and for 45 minutes after eating.
- Cut food into small, bite-sized pieces.
- Check the mouth before eating to make sure it is clear of food.
- Give mouth care before and after each meal as directed by the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) or health care team.
- Give close or distant supervision as directed by the health care team.

Using cues for swallowing

Talk with a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) about the cues for swallowing that may also be recommended. Cues for swallowing are behaviors used to make feeding and swallowing safer.

If you are working with an SLP, ask him or her to watch you practice these behaviors before leaving the hospital.

The SLP can also help you with more information about safe feeding and swallowing.