



BRIEFINGS FOR CARERS

ASPIRATION PNEUMONIA

What is it?

It's pneumonia that's caused by bacteria entering the lungs and causing a severe infection. Often, the bacteria get into the lungs through food, fluid or saliva. It's a cause of death for many people with learning disabilities, which sometimes could be avoided.

Who is most at risk?

- People with learning disabilities who have eating and drinking difficulties.
- People who have particular eating and drinking behaviours, such as eating too fast or overloading their mouth, moving around while eating, or not chewing food well.
- Those who need support with eating.
- People who have poor oral hygiene such as tooth decay or gum disease.
- People who need help with oral care.
- Those who have experienced stroke, Parkinson's disease or dementia.
- People with profound and multiple disabilities.
- People who take certain medications, especially ones which make them sleepy or give a dry mouth.
- Those who receive their food through a tube.

Reducing the risk: what to do to reduce risks for those in the 'most at risk' groups above

Refer to a Speech and Language Therapist.

Follow individual mealtime management plans.

Oral Hygiene: support the person with regular toothbrushing and dental checks.

Training: ensure everyone supporting the person knows how to deal with a choking incident.

Monitor food and drink intake, weight, coughing and choking incidents at mealtimes.

Review: ask the GP for a review of a person's medications if you think they are aspirating.

Common signs of Aspiration

Coughing or choking when eating or drinking

Difficulty breathing: the person may breathe rapidly, gasp or wheeze

A wet or gurgly voice around mealtimes

Eyes watering at mealtimes

Raised temperature

Change in skin colour

Longer term

Weight loss

Recurrent chest infections or pneumonias

Refusing food or reduced enjoyment of eating

Dehydration or malnutrition

If someone shows signs of infection, call GP or out of hours service

If they are very poorly, dial 999

Prompt treatment can save someone's life!