

Aspiration

When we swallow, food, drink and saliva should pass from the mouth, down the food pipe and into the stomach. Aspiration occurs when food, drink or saliva goes the wrong way, enters the windpipe and goes into the lungs. Aspiration is uncomfortable and may put the child/young person at risk of choking and chest infections.

If you think your child/young person might be aspirating, you need to contact your doctor, health visitor or Speech and Language Therapist for advice. If you are waiting for your first appointment with the Speech and Language Therapy eating, drinking and swallowing service and your child is experiencing the following symptoms please call 01743 450800 option 4 and ask to speak to a Speech and Language Therapist.

| Acute signs of aspiration | Chronic signs of aspiration |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> coughing/choking during or/and after eating and drinking gagging changes in vocal quality (e.g. wet or gurgly) watering of the eyes sudden change in colour when eating/drinking obvious signs of discomfort when eating/drinking change in breathing rhythm (e.g. prolonged pauses or gasping) getting tired during feed vocalising and throat clearing head bobbing/rocking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> weight loss and food refusal hunger excess saliva (unable to manage secretions, not necessarily more secretions) re-occurring chest infections / respiratory difficulties/ pneumonia / right lung based infections |

Stress signals which can be linked to aspiration when noted during eating or drinking:

| Moderate | Major |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sighing -Yawning -Sneezing -Sweating -Hiccups -Straining | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coughing -Gagging -Irregular respiration -Tears |

Silent Aspiration: Usually parents/carers are aware when their child/young person is struggling to swallow but sometimes aspiration can be silent and much harder to pick up. The most obvious signs in such cases are frequent chest infections, pneumonia and poor weight gain.

Indirect Aspiration: Aspiration can also occur when the stomach contents reflux back up the food pipe and spill over into the lungs.