

# ASPIRATION



WHY **MUST** I  
KNOW ABOUT  
THIS?

**ASPIRATION** means food (liquids, saliva or other items) either going into the airway instead of the stomach or moving back up through the esophagus (food tube) from the stomach and spilling into the person's airway.

**Some people cough up food or drink when it goes into their lungs, but many people cannot do that because of:**

- Poor muscle coordination
- Lack of awareness
- Fatigue
- Some medication side effects
- Poor eating habits such as eating too much or too fast
- Some medical conditions
- Poor posture when eating
- Seizures
- The aging process

## **DO YOU KNOW that ASPIRATION can be life-threatening and may result in:**

- Damaged lungs that can become infected (the more frequent the aspiration, the more damage that may occur)
- Life-threatening pneumonia
- Infection spreading to the blood stream and other areas of the body
- Shock!
- Death

### **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF swallowing difficulties?**

- Coughing before, during or after swallowing
- Much drooling, especially during meals
- Choking on soft foods such as white bread or harder foods not cut into small enough pieces, or taking big bites
- Frequent throat clearing
- Too many swallows with food
- Getting tired at the end of a meal, wheezing or short of breath
- A ***gurgling*** voice during or after eating or drinking
- Repeated episodes of choking, frequent colds, a history of pneumonia or upper respiratory infections



**IF ANYONE YOU SUPPORT SHOWS ANY OF THESE SIGNS OR IF YOU THINK THERE IS A PROBLEM:**

**Call 911 if the person is blue, having difficulty breathing or looks very ill.**

**Otherwise:**

- Document what you see
- Tell other staff about your concerns
- Tell your supervisor what you see
- Offer foods that the person seems to swallow easily
- Have the person eat at a slower pace
- Stop the meal if the person is having difficulty
- Tell the doctor what you see



**REMEMBER – SOMEONE'S LIFE  
MAY DEPEND ON YOUR EARLY OBSERVATION!**