

Aspiration: Is my child at risk?

Who is at risk? Why does it matter?

Children with physical or developmental disabilities may have trouble swallowing, which can increase their risk of aspiration. Aspiration is harmful to your child's health and may lead to infections and/or lung damage.

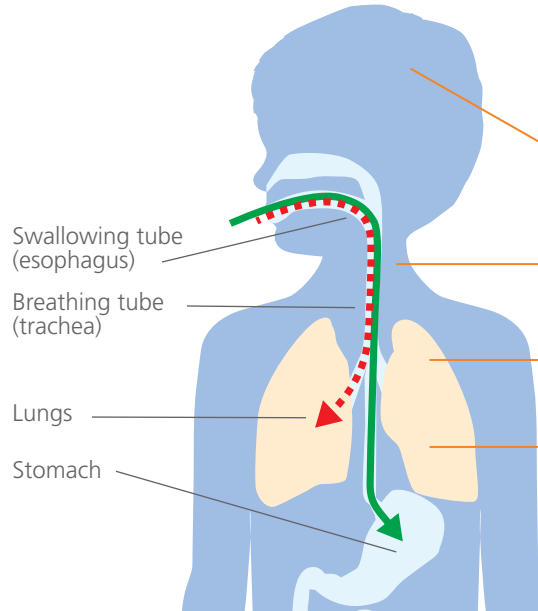
What is aspiration?

Safe swallowing is when food or liquid moves from the mouth down the swallowing tube (esophagus) and into the stomach. This process is shown by the **solid green line**.

Aspiration happens when **food, liquid, saliva** or **vomit** goes into the breathing tube (trachea) and down into the lungs. This is shown by the **dotted red line**.

Aspiration can be silent

Aspiration can happen without any visible signs of distress, so you may not be aware that your child is aspirating. When this happens, it is called **silent aspiration**.



How do I know if my child might be aspirating?



Fevers without other signs of sickness



Coughing, choking or wet sounds during or after eating



Chest infections



Breathing problems (e.g. wheezing) that look like asthma



No symptoms (Silent aspiration)

What can I do if I am concerned about my child's risk of aspiration?

If you are concerned that your child might be at risk of aspiration, speak to your child's health care provider about next steps. This could be your speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, doctor or dietitian. They may recommend a referral for an assessment in your community or to a specialized feeding team.

Ways to reduce aspiration risk

If you feel your child is at risk, the first step is to contact your health care provider.

Work together with your child's health care providers to pick the best ways to reduce your child's risk for aspiration. Here are some examples:



Manage medical issues
(e.g. reflux and
constipation)



Change positioning
during eating and drinking



Change food/
liquid temperature
or flavour



Adjust size of bite/sip



Adjust how fast
food/liquid is given



Make fluids thinner
or thicker



Change food texture

For information on Holland Bloorview's feeding and swallowing services, visit: www.hollandbloorview.ca/feedingservice
or contact 1-800-363-2440 ext. 3835