

# Treatment for Aspiration (Child)



Aspiration is when something enters the airway or lungs by accident. It may be food, liquid, or some other material. This can cause serious health problems, such as pneumonia. Aspiration can happen when a person has trouble swallowing normally. This is known as dysphagia. It can also happen if a child has gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). This is when the contents of the stomach come back up into the throat.

## Types of treatment

Treatment for aspiration may vary depending on the cause and severity. Treatments for your child may include:

- Making changes in position and posture during meals
- Changing the thickness of liquids
- Changing the types of foods in your child's diet
- Doing exercises to help with swallowing (for an older child)
- Taking medicines or having a botulinum toxin injection for children who make excess saliva
- Having surgery to reduce reflux
- Having surgery to fix a problem such as a cleft palate

If your child still has a high risk for aspiration despite these methods, they may need a special tube to help with eating for a while. The feeding tube will help your child get proper nutrition until their risk for aspiration improves. Your child will not eat or drink as normal until the tube is removed. A thin tube may be put through the nose down into the stomach. This is called a nasogastric tube. This may be used for a short time while other treatment is considered. Or a tube may be put directly into your child's stomach through the abdominal skin during a surgery. This is called a gastrostomy tube.

In some children, aspiration lessens over time. In other cases, a child may need more treatment to address the cause. Your child's healthcare providers will carefully watch your child so that they can return to normal eating as soon as possible.

Talk with your child's healthcare provider if your child has a tracheostomy tube. You may need to suction food or liquid from the tube.

## Possible complications of aspiration

A major complication of aspiration is harm to the lungs. When food, drink, or stomach contents make their way into your child's lungs, it can damage the tissues there. The damage can sometimes be severe. Aspiration also increases the risk for pneumonia. This is an infection of the lungs that causes fluid to build up in the lungs. Pneumonia needs to be treated with antibiotics. In some cases, it may cause death.

Other possible complications from aspiration include:

- Dehydration
- Malnutrition
- Weight loss
- Increased risk for other illness

## When to call your child's healthcare provider

Call your child's healthcare provider if your child has any signs or symptoms of aspiration. It needs to be treated as soon as possible.

## Call 911

Call **911** if any of these occur:

- Major trouble breathing
- Blue tint to the lips or fingernails
- Confusion
- Very drowsy or trouble waking up
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Rapid heart rate
- Seizure

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