What is ASPIRATION PNEUMONIA?

It is the inflammation of the lungs due to infection following the inhalation of foreign objects, such as food or fluid.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ASPIRATION

- Coughing, gagging, choking
- Changes in respiratory status
- Vital signs and oxygen saturation beyond suggested limits
- Increased secretions
- Generalized distress

What is ASPIRATION?

Aspiration is the penetration of food, fluid or other foreign bodies below the vocal cords causing cough, wheezing, pneumonia, respiratory failure or death.

RISK FACTORS OF ASPIRATION

- Laryngeal dysfunction
- Dysphagia (see F:\Dysphagia.ppt)
- Gastro-esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
- Feeding tubes
- Impaired neuromuscular status

Sometimes aspiration is silent rather than showing obvious signs and symptoms. When this happens, you may see:

- Unexplained fevers
- Frequent respiratory illnesses
- Unexplained weight loss / refusal of food
- Pneumonias

ASPIRATION PNEUMONIA IS A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH AMONG PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.
GENERAL ASPIRATION PRECAUTIONS:

1. Proper positioning of head and body
   - Hips straight, level and to the back of the chair.
   - Support arms and feet.
   - Head stays looking forward with nose, navel, knees and toes in line.

2. Good oral hygiene
   - Brush teeth or clean the mouth after each meal (even people without teeth!).
   - Bacteria in the mouth and can be aspirated into the lungs and can cause infection.

3. Knowing the high risk choking foods

4. Knowing the signs and symptoms of swallowing difficulty
   Some families feel it would be helpful to teach their loved ones the universal sign for choking. However, if you feel the airway is blocked, don’t wait for a sign to initiate the proper assistance. Learn the Heimlich maneuver/abdominal thrust.

Possible Signs and Symptoms of Chewing or Swallowing Difficulty
- Coughing or choking
- Wet/gurgy vocal quality
- Frequent throat clearing
- Gagging
- Crying or unusual behaviors during meals
- Grimacing while eating
- Reddening of the face/sweating during meals
- Difficulty chewing ~ swallowing food
- Vomiting after meals
- Taking a very long time to eat
- Swallowing large amounts of food / drink rapidly
- Drooling
- Noticing pocketed food or food still in the mouth after meals