

THE FATAL FOUR

There are four major health issues identified in people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that have led to serious illnesses, infections, and sometimes death. They are called the Fatal Four: dehydration, seizures, choking/aspiration, and constipation.

CHOKING/ASPIRATION

Causes of Choking

Poor Eating Habits

Eating too fast
Placing large amounts of food in mouth
Choosing not to wear dentures
Poor posture
Eating food different from consistency of one's food

Medical Reasons for Choking

Dry mouth
Decayed /missing teeth
Difficulty chewing/swallowing
Aging
Certain medications
GERD

Signs of Choking

Severe coughing, gagging
Hitting chest
Putting hands on throat
Unable to talk
Unable to breath

Anxious/agitated
Red face
Noisy breathing
Skin color change – gray or blue
Loss of consciousness

ONE SINGLE CHOKING EVENT MAY BE A WARNING SIGN FOR FUTURE CHOKING EVENTS.

What to Do for Choking

Begin first aid if person is alert and choking, but unable to cough, breathe, or speak. Instruct someone to call 911.

If unconscious, call 911, begin first aid/CPR. **Do not seek supervisor approval before calling 911.**
Notify the doctor of every choking event experienced.

Be Proactive to Prevent Choking

- Identify who is at risk and discuss with physician
- Prepare proper consistency of food and fluids
- Use adaptive equipment (utensils, cups, plates)
- Ensure dentures are in place and fit properly
- Encourage smaller bites of food
- Provide reminders to eat at slower pace
- Encourage sips of fluid between bites of food
- Remind person to swallow before speaking

Feed Person Safely

- Sit down facing the person
- Offer small bites of food
- Offer sips of fluids during meal/snack
- Converse with the person after swallowing food

Active Supervision

Never leave people identified as being at risk for choking unattended during meals. Look at the person's face, watch them chew and swallow to identify signs of difficulty swallowing. Never leave the person alone with foods of different consistency.

CHOKING IS LIFE THREATENING WHEN FOOD BLOCKS THE AIRWAY AND THE PERSON IS UNABLE TO BREATHE.

Source: PA Dept. of Human Services PowerPoint on The Fatal Four, August 2018