

# THE FATAL FOUR IN I/DD

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



DEHYDRATION



SEIZURE



CHOKING



CONSTIPATION

ONE SINGLE CHOKING EVENT MAY BE A WARNING SIGN FOR FUTURE CHOKING EVENTS. CHOKING IS LIFE THREATENING WHEN FOOD BLOCKS THE AIRWAY AND THE PERSON IS UNABLE TO BREATHE.

## CAUSES OF CHOKING

- Eating too quickly
- Placing large amounts of food in mouth
- Choosing not to wear dentures
- Poor posture while eating
- Eating food with consistency difficult to swallow
- Dry mouth
- Decayed, missing teeth
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing
- Aging
- Certain medications

## SIGNS OF CHOKING

- Severe coughing, gagging
- Hitting chest
- Putting hands on throat
- Inability to talk
- Inability to breath
- Anxiety; agitation
- Red face
- Noisy breathing
- Skin color - gray or blue
- Loss of consciousness

## BE PROACTIVE TO PREVENT CHOKING

- Identify people at risk and discuss with physician.
- Prepare foods and drinks to proper consistency.
- Use adaptive equipment - utensils, cups, plates.
- Encourage use of properly fitted dental appliances.
- Encourage small bites of food.
- Provide reminders to eat at slower pace.
- Encourage sips of fluid between bites of food.
- Provide reminders to swallow before speaking.

## SAFE FEEDING TECHNIQUES

- Sit down facing the person.
- Offer small bites of food.
- Offer sips of fluids between bites.
- Converse only after the person swallows.

## WHAT TO DO FOR CHOKING

- If the person is alert, but unable to cough, breathe, or speak begin first aid and instruct someone to call 911.
- If the person is unconscious, call 911 immediately and begin first aid/CPR. Do not seek supervisor approval before calling 911.
- Notify physician of every choking event the person experienced.

## ACTIVE SUPERVISION

Never leave a person who is identified as at risk for choking unattended during meals. Observe the person's face for signs of difficulty while swallowing. Never leave the person unattended with foods of different consistency.