

Let's Talk About...

When Drinking or Eating Is Not Safe

Your child needs nutrition (food) and hydration (liquids) to live and grow. Usually, they get these by eating and drinking. But sometimes food or drink does not move safely from your child's mouth to their stomach. Instead, it goes down the wrong way, toward the lungs. This is called **aspiration** [as-puh-REY-shuhn].

How will my child's swallowing be tested?

A modified barium swallow (MBS) study is an x-ray test that shows how food and drink move down your child's throat when they swallow. This test can show aspiration as it happens.

What problems can happen when my child aspirates?

Aspiration is dangerous to your child's lungs and their long-term health. If your child aspirates, they might:

- Have frequent lung infections
- Develop chronic (long-term) lung disease
- Get pneumonia [noo-MOAN-yuh] and need to go to the hospital for treatment
- Not be able to stop aspirating in the future

Will my child stop aspirating?

Whether or not your child will stop aspirating depends on many things, such as:

- What causes the aspiration
- The level of feeling (sensation) in their throat
- Your child's other medical conditions
- How your child grows and changes over time

What can be done to help my child swallow safely?

It is important to take steps to keep your child from aspirating. A treatment using thicker liquids is sometimes used to stop aspiration. However, sometimes a child may even aspirate thick liquids. In these situations, it is often recommended to put in a feeding tube. A feeding tube is a soft, flexible tube that goes through the nose and extends into the stomach or upper intestine. The tube is used to give your child the nutrition and liquids they need to grow.

How is aspiration treated?

If your child aspirates, the medical team will focus on the following **3 factors** during treatment:

- 1 Safety.** Safety lays the foundation for your child's care. Safety usually means stopping your child from eating and drinking the foods and liquids they aspirate. **Limiting aspiration is foundational for safety.**
- 2 Nutrition and hydration.** A treatment using thicker liquids is sometimes used to stop aspiration. Sometimes, a child may even aspirate thick liquids. In this situation, your child's doctor may recommend the placement of a feeding tube.

Your child's medical team, including a dietitian or doctor, will recommend the best ways to provide nutrition and hydration to sustain life and support growth.
- 3 Eating and drinking.** Your child's feeding therapist may recommend ways to modify eating and drinking. A period of time when your child does not drink or eat may also be recommended.



What do I need to do next?

As part of your child's care, their doctor may recommend:

- Feeding therapy
- Follow-up appointments with other doctors or healthcare specialists
- A repeat MBS study to see if your child's ability to swallow changes

Questions for my doctor

Notes

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