

The Fatal Five in IDD

ASPIRATION

Inhaling particles into the airway;
food or drinks “going down the wrong pipe”

WARNING SIGNS

- Drooling during meals
- Changes in breathing patterns
- Regular coughing or sneezing while eating
- Making gurgling sounds after eating
- Shortness of breath
- Excessive throat clearing
- Feeling like something is stuck in their throat
- Sudden coughing, wheezing, or hoarseness

RISK FACTORS

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- Eating too quickly
- Putting too much food in their mouth
- Difficulty controlling head or neck muscles
- Difficulty sitting up straight
- Not fully conscious or aware
- Dental problems that prevent adequate chewing
- A small airway, a large tongue, or other anatomical variation
- Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

WHAT TO DO

- Encourage them to spit out any food or beverage.
- Encourage them to keep coughing to clear the material from their airway.
- Do not give them more food or drink until they have returned to their baseline.

SIGNS OF ASPIRATION PNEUMONIA

Cough, especially involving bloody or green sputum

Shortness of breath or wheezing

Chest pain or painful breathing

Fever, perspiration, and fatigue

Swallowing difficulty, not pre-existing

Blue tinge to the face or lips

Bad breath not from dental issues

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CONSTIPATION

RISK FACTORS

- Dehydration
- Nerve problems or damage
- Not enough dietary fiber
- Inactivity/immobility
- Surgery or hospitalization
- Poor muscle function or tone
- Iron and calcium supplements
- Being female, especially if pregnant
- Diabetes, Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis, or irritable bowel syndrome

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Abdominal bloating or pain
- Straining on the toilet
- Feeling like they still need to go after having used the bathroom
- Infrequent stools
- Hard or lumpy stools
- Gas or liquid stool

HOW TO PREVENT CONSTIPATION

Encourage a balanced, healthy diet

Increasing fiber and reducing dairy or red meat can ease or prevent constipation.

Increase intake of fluids

Constipation occurs when stools are dry, so increasing fluids can help.

Support and develop routines

Routines such as using the toilet at a certain time of day promote healthy bowel habits. Plan ahead. Unless absolutely necessary, never advise someone to "hold it."

Increase physical activity

Integrating physical activity into the day helps get the digestive tract moving.

Discourage alcohol consumption

Alcohol consumption increases dehydration and constipation.

Try probiotics

Some studies have shown that probiotics, like the kinds commonly found in some varieties of yogurt, can improve many bowel problems, including constipation.

Be aware of sodium intake

Salt dries out the stool and increases the risk of constipation.

Record bowel movements

Tracking frequency, size, and consistency will enable you to identify and intervene.

Consider stool softeners

Many people with IDD benefit from regular use of stool softeners or fiber supplements to make their stools easier to pass. Note that although many of these are available over the counter, in many service settings you will need a physician's order to use them.

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DEHYDRATION

RISK FACTORS

- Extreme temperatures, both hot and cold
- Diabetes
- Decreased fluid intake for any reason
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- Being elderly or very young
- Common illnesses, fever, and infections
- Excessive exertion or perspiration
- Medications that increase urination

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Feeling thirsty
- Decreased urine output or dark, concentrated urine
- Tiredness or lethargy
- Muscle cramps
- Low energy
- Dizziness or fainting
- Irritability
- Headache
- Constipation
- Confusion or disorientation
- Dry mouth, tongue, or skin
- Rapid heartbeat or breathing

HOW TO PREVENT DEHYDRATION

Build regular and healthy routines

Help the people you support build routines, such as having a glass of water after coming home from work or school or when an activity is finished.

Beware alcohol and salt

Both impact the body's electrolyte balance. A diet high in salt or drinking any amount of alcohol requires increased fluid consumption.

Monitor and track fluid intake

If you are working with someone who can't manage their own fluid intake, be sure to keep good records to coordinate with other staff.

Be a role model for them

Offer frequent reminders to drink fluids. If you are thirsty, suggest that you and the person you support get a drink together.

Be creative with your support

Figure out how the individual prefers their liquids. Carbonated? Fruit flavored? With a straw?

Know what counts and hydrates

Almost any fluid provides hydration, including coffee, tea, soda, some fruits and vegetables, popsicles, smoothies, and similar treats.

Consider consistency of liquids

Some people may have trouble swallowing thin liquids and may prefer thicker beverages, such as smoothies.

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SEIZURES

WARNING SIGNS

- Drooling
- Vomiting
- Sensory abnormalities
- Tremors or “shaking”
- Unusual eye movements
- Exhaustion
- Headaches
- Incontinence
- A scream or cry
- Loss of consciousness
- Disorientation or confusion
- Appearing “absent” or staring
- Loss of control over parts of the body

HOW TO HELP DURING SEIZURES

- Help the person prevent injury from colliding with furniture or other things
- Prevent choking by putting them on their side or in recovery position
- Do not restrain them
- Get help if needed
- Follow the personalized seizure plan
- Report what happened before and during seizure to medical team
- Help the person deal with fear or disorientation after seizure
- Do not offer food and drinks until they have recovered
- Stay with them until fully awake

HOW TO PREVENT SEIZURES

Recommend showers

It takes very little water to drown, so a seizure while in the bath can be fatal. Encourage a person at risk for seizures to take showers instead.

The use of a shower chair can reduce the risk of slipping and falling if a seizure occurs.

Treat fever and other illnesses

Illnesses, particularly high fevers, can sometimes trigger seizures, particularly in individuals with a known seizure disorder.

Beware heat and dehydration

Intense heat can increase dehydration, which increases the risk of seizures.

Recognize situational hazards

A person with a seizure disorder can often take part in a wide variety of typical activities. You need to be aware of which activities pose a special risk for the person you support. Stairs, for example, can be dangerous for someone who typically falls when they seize and who has no prior warning of an oncoming seizure.

Know their warning signs

Some people have specific warning signs prior to a seizure. The person may feel dizzy, lose sensation in part of their body, or have other specific signs that a seizure is about to happen. Recognizing these signs can create an opportunity to lie down, move away from hazards, or call for help if needed.

Document all seizures

High levels of stress can trigger seizures as well as other risk factors, such as not getting enough sleep.

Avoid known triggers

Triggers vary and may include specific songs, flashing lights, hormonal fluctuations, or drug or alcohol use.

Help manage stress levels

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Provide medication support

Help the individuals you serve take their anticonvulsant medications on time and as prescribed by their doctor.

Support sleep hygiene

Good sleep hygiene includes going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day and avoiding caffeine and blue screens late at night.

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SEPSIS

Extreme response to an infection which triggers a chain reaction throughout the body and can quickly lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death if left untreated.

RISK FACTORS

- Age, specifically people over 65 and children younger than 1 year old
- Compromised immune systems
- Chronic health conditions such as diabetes, lung disease, cancer, and kidney disease
- People who have had sepsis in the past
- Pregnant women
- People who have poor hygiene or live in an unhealthy environment

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Fast heart rate or low blood pressure
- Fever, shivering, or feeling cold
- Confusion or disorientation
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe pain or discomfort
- Skin that feels sweaty or clammy

HOW TO PREVENT SEPSIS

Contact medical professionals

In case of emergency, contact the nurse or the person's physician and let them know the symptoms you have seen and share your concerns.

Prioritize hygiene

Encourage good personal hygiene, including handwashing.

Take care of any injuries

Keep cuts and wounds clean and covered until healed, unless otherwise directed.

Know the signs

Know the signs and symptoms of sepsis.

Manage other conditions

Help the person manage chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, osteopenia, and dementia.

Understand your client

Know the health history of the person you serve.