

Sample Choking Prevention Policy

PURPOSE:

The purpose of a choking prevention policy is to establish guidelines for creating a safe dining experience and preventing aspiration and/or choking. Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities are at risk for aspiration and choking which can lead to serious health complications and/or death.

Medical Risk Factors for choking include:

- Difficulty maintaining a good eating position independently
- Having decreased muscle tone or coordination
- Having dysphagia
- Having a decreased gag reflex
- Having a seizure disorder
- Having problems with oral or dental health, such as missing or loose teeth
- Having a gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Side effects of medication

Behavioral Risk Factors for choking include:

- Eating too quickly
- Putting too much food in their mouth
- Taking nearby food that is not theirs
- Eating while talking or laughing
- Eating things that are not food (Pica)

POLICY:

Creating a safe dining experience is of utmost importance. A safe dining experience will promote an enjoyable social mealtime experience balanced with precautions to ensure the health and safety of all individuals. All food will be consumed in an area designated as appropriate for eating, such as the dining room, kitchen area, or outdoor picnic table area, with staff supervision where indicated. (Bedrooms are not considered appropriate places for eating).

PROCEDURE:

1. All staff will be trained in Mealtime Strategies upon employment. Training includes:
 - a. Identifying risk factors for choking or other swallowing problems
 - b. Identify signs that a person may be choking or having other swallowing problems
 - c. Preparing food according to the prescribed diet textures
 - d. Preparing liquids according to the prescribed liquid consistencies

- e. Creating safe practices for mealtime support that reduce the risk of choking or aspiration
2. All staff will be trained in CPR/First Aid, including prevention of choking and interventions to clear an airway obstruction for conscious and unconscious individuals and special situations. Staff are required to maintain current certification in CPR and First Aid.
3. Diet orders are designed to keep a person safe while they eat. Staff must follow all diet orders carefully and consistently.
4. In the event of a diet change, all staff should be re-trained immediately upon receipt of a new diet prescription.
5. Staff must be alert and pay careful attention when working with an individual with pica. Staff should be aware of the habits of the individual/patterns of non-food consumption.
6. In order to minimize the possibility of an individual choking or aspirating, all food will be consumed in an area designated as appropriate for eating, such as the dining room, kitchen area, or outdoor picnic table area with staff supervision where indicated. (Bedrooms are not considered appropriate places for eating).
7. Staff will sit at the dining table with individuals and supervise all dining experiences, maintaining the proper staff-to-individual supervision ratio.
8. Recognizing and responding to risk factors is critical to preventing serious incidents while eating. By being aware of all warning signs or high-risk behaviors, you can reduce the person's risk of harm from choking. Proper supervision includes:
 - a. Positioning people appropriately
 - b. Ensuring the proper utensils or adaptive equipment are available
 - c. Ensuring all utensils and adaptive equipment are in good condition
 - d. Preparing the food according to the prescribed diet
 - e. Helping individuals to eat slowly
 - f. Reminding individuals to chew food thoroughly
 - g. Encouraging a sip of water between bites of food
 - h. Reminding individuals to take their time eating and not talk with food in their mouths
 - i. "All hands on deck": staff should prioritize mealtimes and put off other duties/household chores until the meal is completed.
9. Staff must be alert to the behavior of the individuals they support. This support can often reduce risky eating behavior.
10. Encourage independence. Assist in the areas the individual requires assistance.
11. Provide Dignity and Respect
12. Praise, chat, be social, provide positive feedback and intervention