

## *A Note about Silent Aspiration*

Aspiration happens when anything other than air goes into the lungs. The most common sign of aspiration is coughing and choking. When you cough or choke, others can see that happening and may react to try to help you clear your airway. Sometimes, however, aspiration happens and there is no immediately observable sign. This is called silent aspiration. **Silent Aspiration** can occur with food, liquid, saliva, toothpaste, or stomach contents that back up when lying down after meals. Silent aspiration can also occur in individuals with feeding tubes. It can occur anytime during the day or evening, during a meal or after a meal.

Here are TEN indicators of **Silent Aspiration**:

1. Continuous eye watering or nose running while eating, drinking, brushing teeth or managing saliva.
2. Increase work of breathing or effort to breath. You may notice the individual's chest or abdomen rising and falling quickly.
3. Low grade or persistent fever. This can indicate pneumonia, which is sometimes an indicator of aspiration.
4. Wet-sounding breathing/gurgling, which can indicate the airway is not clear.
5. Congestion with or after eating/drinking.
6. Noisy breathing or wheezing.
7. Refusing to eat or drink. Aspiration is often painful. For individuals who cannot otherwise communicate that every time they eat, it hurts, refusing to eat might be a sign of aspiration.
8. Frequent infections or pneumonia, particularly right lower lobe pneumonia.
9. Complaints of a feeling that food or liquid is stuck in some part of the throat.
10. Fatigue with eating can increase weakness, which can increase risk of aspiration. If you continue to feed someone when they are too tired, you might be causing them to aspirate, and this aspiration may be silent.