

Aspiration: Is my child at risk?

Who is at risk? Why does it matter?

Many infants, children and youth including those with medical, physical, and/or developmental challenges, may have trouble swallowing, which can increase their risk of aspiration. Aspiration is harmful to your child's health and may lead to infections and/or lung damage.

What is aspiration?

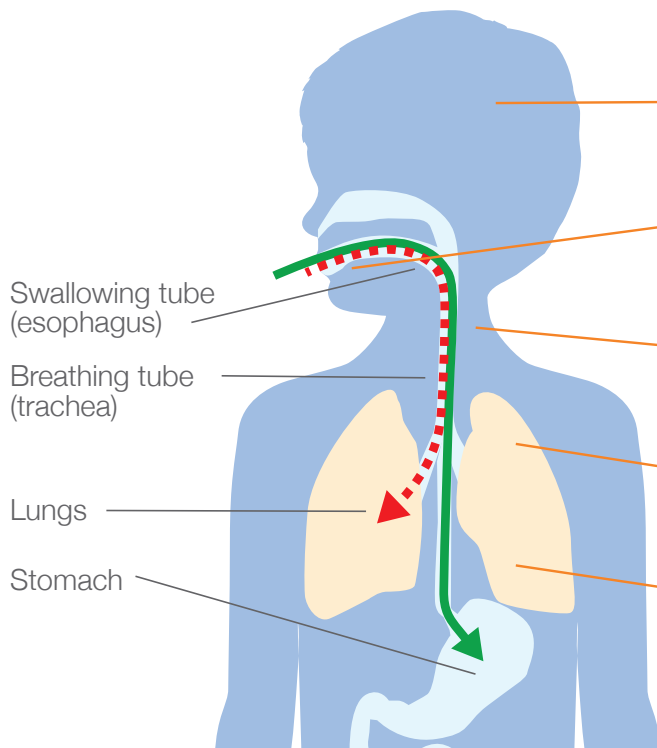
Safe swallowing is when food or liquid moves from the mouth down the swallowing tube (esophagus) and into the stomach. This process is shown by the **solid green line**.

Aspiration happens when food, liquid, saliva or vomit goes into the breathing tube (trachea) and down into the lungs. This is shown by the **dotted red line**.

Aspiration can be silent

Aspiration can happen without any obvious signs of stress, so you may not be aware that your child is aspirating. When this happens, it is called silent aspiration.

How do I know if my child might be aspirating?



Fevers without other signs of sickness



Signs of stress and refusal to eat or drink



Coughing, choking or wet sounds during or after eating



Repeated chest infections



Breathing problems (e.g. wheezing) that look like asthma



You may not know because sometimes there are no obvious symptoms (silent aspiration)

**If you feel your child is at risk, the first step is to contact your healthcare provider.
For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.**