

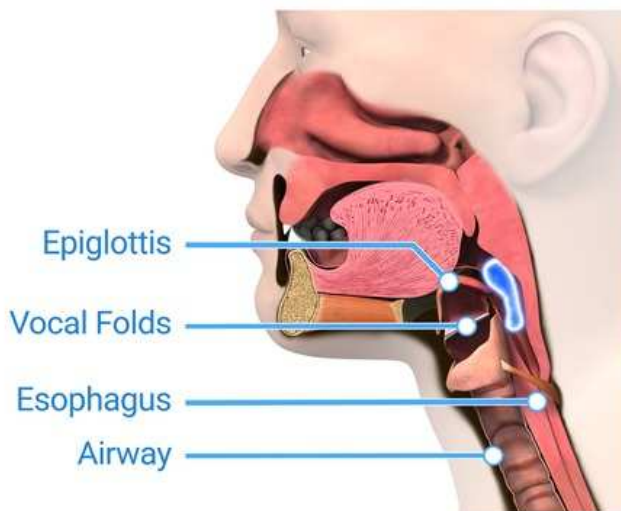
Understanding Your Condition

Aspiration Pneumonia

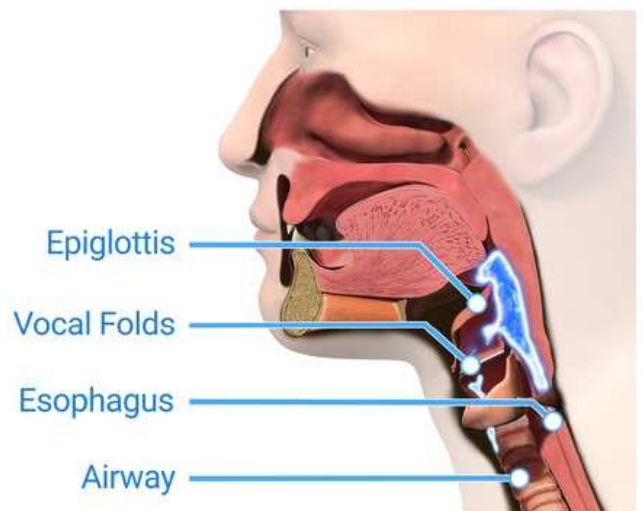
PNEUMONIA IS A LUNG INFECTION caused by germs like bacteria, viruses or other microscopic organisms. There are many different types of pneumonia, but one common type (especially for people who have trouble swallowing, or dysphagia) is aspiration pneumonia.

What is aspiration pneumonia?

Aspiration pneumonia is a lung infection that occurs when material “goes down the wrong way” when you swallow. Instead of traveling towards your stomach, food or liquid may drop below your vocal cords and into your airway and lungs. This is called “aspiration.” You can also aspirate pills, saliva, vomit, or contents that come back up from your stomach and digestive tract.



Normal Swallow. In the normal swallow, your mouth and throat move to push down the food/liquids and to protect your airway while you are swallowing. Food/fluid travels down your esophagus towards your stomach.



Aspiration. Aspiration occurs when food/liquid is misdirected into the airway, where it can travel towards the lungs. This may be due to problems with controlling food/liquid in the mouth, sealing up the top of the airway, and/or clearing all the food/liquid out of the throat and esophagus.

Food, liquid, and other material can carry germs that affect the lungs. Sometimes your lungs can clear on their own. Other times, the germs cause pneumonia and make you sick.

Aspiration does not always cause pneumonia. (We all aspirate a little bit!)

Whether or not someone develops pneumonia depends on many factors:



Some people are at **higher risk** for aspiration pneumonia than others. You may be at increased risk if you have any of the following:

- ▶ Frequent aspiration
- ▶ Difficulty keeping your mouth clean through teeth brushing and mouthwash
- ▶ Weakened immune system
- ▶ Depend on others to feed you or clean your mouth
- ▶ Take many pills
- ▶ Smoke
- ▶ Bedridden or need to sleep all the time

Symptoms of aspiration pneumonia include:

- ▶ Chest pain
- ▶ Difficulty breathing
- ▶ Wheezing
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Cough, possibly with foul-smelling, green, or dark phlegm
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Bad breath
- ▶ Excessive sweating

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will do a physical exam and may order a chest x-ray and/or blood test to help determine if you have aspiration pneumonia.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the severity of your pneumonia. Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics, especially if you are really sick and have pus in your lungs (an abscess).

If your pneumonia is severe, you may need to be hospitalized. If you are having difficulty breathing, you may need extra oxygen or a breathing machine.

The key is to **prevent aspiration** in the first place. A comprehensive evaluation of your eating and swallowing by a speech-language pathologist may help identify ways to make aspiration less likely.